Phyllis Piddington

SOUTHERN RAINBOW

GULF OF ST. VINCENT

SWAMPY GROUND

PORT ADELAIDE

ROAD TO PORT ADELAIDE

TORRENS RIVER

PORT RIVER

REED BEDS

REED BEDS

LOW GROUNDS

FRESH WATER LAGOONS

STURT CREEK

ROAD TO ADELAIDE

SETTLEMENT

HOLDFAST BAY

FINE PLAINS

NORTH ADELAIDE

WOODED
COUNTRY

THE TOWN
ADELAIDE

GOVERNMENT HUT

THE TIERS
TO MOUNT BARKER

WOODED
COUNTRY

AINS

BROWN
HILL

The Early Settlement of ADELAIDE

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SOUTHERN RAINBOW

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SOUTHERN RAINBOW

PHYLLIS PIDDINGTON

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South Australia "is one of the few places where good children are really a fortune to a man".

South Australian Record 1838.

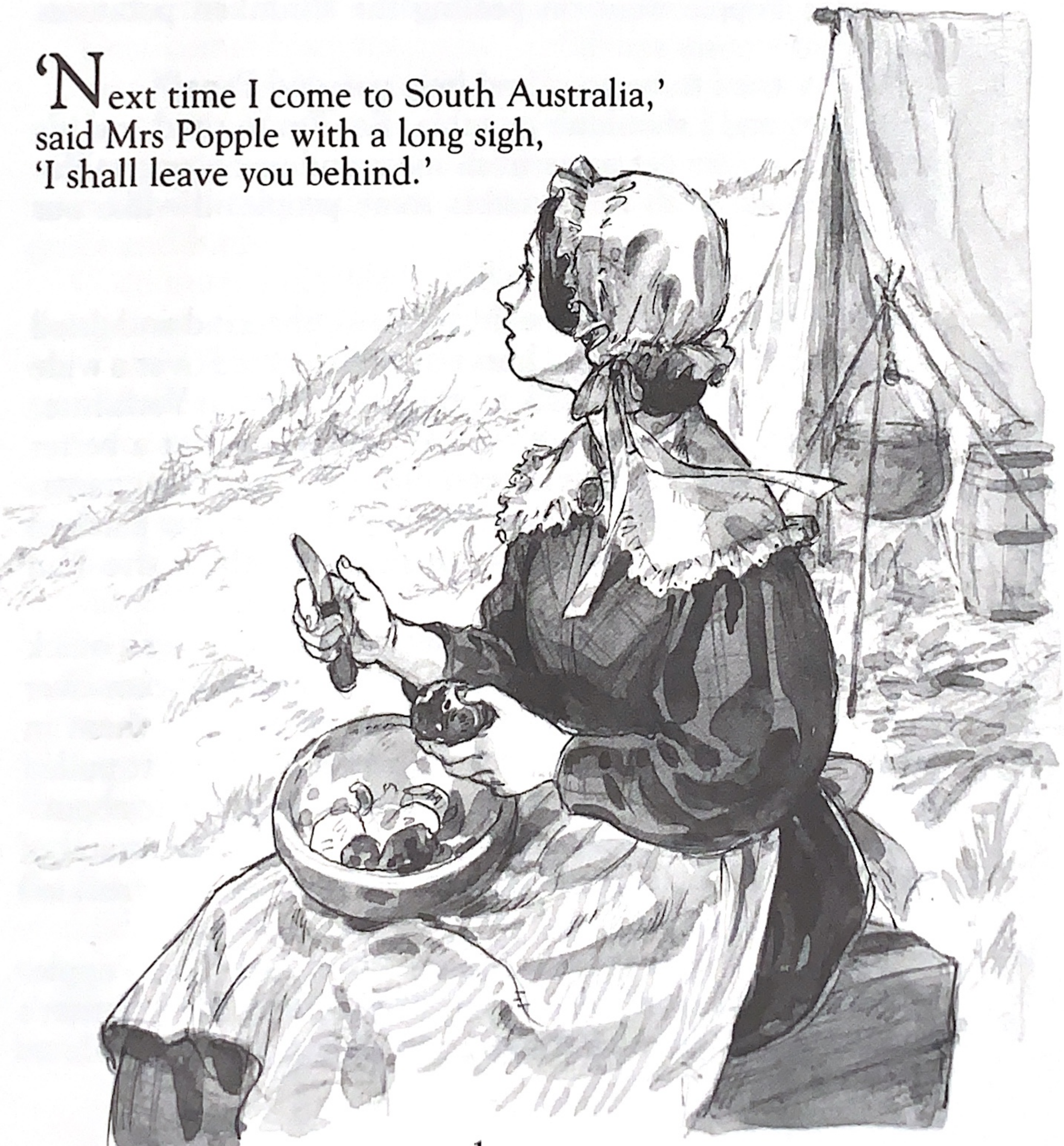
PART 1

HOLDFAST BAY 1837

Chapter 1

The Settlement

'Next time I come to South Australia,'
said Mrs Popple with a long sigh,
'I shall leave you behind.'



Kate looked down at her muddy shoes. Her wet pantalettes stuck to her stockings. Her skirt was ripped.

'Oh Mama!' she exclaimed, 'I couldn't really help it. The nice, clean water you wanted was across some slippery mud and I had to climb over a log as well because you said I wasn't to get the browny water or baby would be sick again and really and truly . . .'

'Never mind, Kate,' said her mother quickly, 'It's my fault because I knocked over the water barrel this morning. Everything's in a muddle.' Mrs Popple sighed again. 'Clara's been in bed for nearly two days now, just when I need her most. Your father and Ben haven't come back yet, Lucy May has wandered off again, and baby has been most tiresome. In fact, all the children here have gone quite wild.'

Annie Popple went on peeling the shrunken potatoes. They had a nasty smell.

'We've tried to be good and help you and Papa.'

'I know and I shouldn't grumble. But I'm so tired and it's so hot. We may get some fresh meat and green vegetables soon, though fresh meat makes some people ill—like our Clara.'

'Yes I know.'

Mrs Popple looked at the dreary trees, the sand and dried grass, and at the tents and huts that were dotted over a wide area. She felt very homesick for their neat farm in Yorkshire. It had been so green there, so cool and quiet. But a better life in South Australia had been promised to all emigrants. Annie Popple had soon seen, however, that the parched countryside would mean a tougher life than she had imagined.

Kate was looking worried, so her mother gave her a quick hug as she said, 'Go and sit under that crooked gum over there. Take your shoes and stockings off and dry them in the sun. Be careful where you sit and keep your skirt pulled well down over your knees; there are so many people about.'

Kate sighed, just like her mother. She flicked a strand of long straight hair out of her eye, and rubbed her freckled nose.

'I'll go and look for Lucy May,' continued Mrs Popple. 'She's probably with those Jones children. Their father's making a reed hut and children mass there like flies.'

'I'll look for her,' volunteered Kate eagerly.

'No *thank* you Kate. I don't want you to get lost too. Just mind our Tob for a while and keep your eye on the fire.'

Kate dragged her feet through the grey sand, snaking a track round prickly bushes and tufts of yellow grass.

'Oh Mama! Here's Tob asleep on the dirt.'

'On the ground, Kate. Don't wake him, what ever you do.' Mrs Popple sounded exasperated.

Kate undid her shoes and flung them down. She hated them. Her mother was so frightened of snakes and lizards that she insisted on special heavy shoes. Kate pulled off her stockings, shoved her pantalettes above her knees and wriggled her toes in the hot sand. It felt wonderful.

Mrs Popple dabbed her sore hands on her apron, brushed away the flies and tried to ease her swollen, aching feet.

'Here comes Lucy May now,' called Kate.

Lucy May dawdled on her way back from the eastern edges of the camp. There were so many interesting people about, and so many boxes, trunks and pieces of furniture scattered round their tents and huts. Best of all, were strange insects, grubs and birds.

'O do hurry Lucy May,' called her mother. 'I want some things from the trunk we left in the sand-hills. Kate is minding Tob.' (What a silly name, she thought to herself. Fancy grandfather calling him Tobias. She often said this.)

Seven-year-old Lucy May, her cheeks flushed and her curls untidy, said, 'I'm *hot*. Can I have a drink of water after my long explore?'

'Not now. Later.'

'Just a *little* one.'

'No.'

'*Please* Mama.'

'No.'

Lucy May, following her mother, trudged over sand and shaggy grass and through the sand-hills. The wind whipped sand into their faces and their eyes smarted as they glimpsed the shimmering, dancing sea. She stared enviously at groups of children who were shouting and laughing as they jumped, tumbled and slid on the dunes.

But her mother sighed again as she looked at the boxes, bundles and pieces of furniture left behind by weary settlers.

Then she shaded her eyes as she watched the ships in Holdfast Bay. A brig from Cape Colony, a small schooner from Van Diemen's Land and the *Lady Ethel*, the ship they had come on, which would soon return to England.

Mrs Popple remembered the family's excitement when they first boarded the ship. She and Mr Popple looked forward to owning and working their own farm—a much bigger farm than they had had in Yorkshire. The children expected life on board ship and in a mysterious new land to be full of adventure.

But the sixty passengers had been herded together for more than three months, with scarcely enough deck space to move. The high wooden sides of the ship prevented any view of the sea in most places, and in stormy weather they were forced to stay below deck, like prisoners, because the

hatches were battened down. She remembered the dirt, the smells and stale and rotting food.

The passengers had longed for the freedom of their new country. But after they had clambered down into little bobbing boats, the sailors had dumped them at the water's edge. A long, hot beach, dry scrub and distant hills awaited them.

Mrs Popple dabbed her hands again and turned sadly to the trunk. 'The lock's rusty. I don't think I can open it.'

'Why don't you wait for Ben and Papa?'

'Because I want something for tea—for a surprise. Wait

a minute. I've nearly got it. Oh dear! I can't lift the lid. It's rusted too.'

'I'll help.' A sandy-haired boy, his shirt sleeves and long trousers rolled up, was playing near by.

'Oh thank you. You're Billie Jamling aren't you?'

Billie nodded as he pulled and heaved and worked with his knife for some time before he succeeded in lifting the lid.

'Oh my good starched table-cloth!' cried Mrs Popple, 'It's going mouldy.' She shook it out. 'I'll spread it in the sun and then we can use it for our tea. We've become very rough and ready in three days. You carry it Lucy May. I'll bring the other things.'

'It's got a horrid smell.' Lucy May held the cloth away from her face.

'You'll be all right. It's not far.'

The flying sand stung Lucy May's face. She stumbled and dropped the end of the cloth. A gust of wind caught the end like a sail. She struggled on blindly, but tripped and tumbled over with her face in the sand. For a moment she could not breathe, and as she began to cry, sand clogged her mouth.

Annie Popple dropped the things she was carrying and tried to run, but twisted her foot and fell down.

A short, stout man appeared. 'Oh lawks!' he exclaimed.

Mrs Popple tried to get up, but her tight-waisted skirt billowing over horsehair pads at the hips added to her difficulties. The plump gentleman trotted down the sand-hill. He gave his handkerchief to Lucy May.

'Thank you Mr Parker. You are very kind.'

'Think nothing of it Mam.' He breathed heavily.

Mrs Popple was trying to rub her foot, clean Lucy May's face and comfort her all at once.

'Just rest yourself, dear lady. No need to hurry, you know.' Mr Parker planted his feet firmly in the sand, stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and began a little friendly chat. 'Yours the tent by the big sand-hill, isn't it? Nice place that. Very nice. Our place is a bit exposed like. Catches the wind. May start a reed hut tomorrow. Is your good man going to build a hut?'

'No. I think not.' Annie Popple spoke primly because she disliked discussing family affairs with acquaintances. Then

she decided to explain properly. 'He's gone to Adelaide today to see about some land. We've brought out a "section house", you see, and we'll move to the country as soon as the land is surveyed. Adelaide's rather crowded now with nearly three hundred people in it.'

'So your husband's a farmer, is he Mam?'

'Yes. The prospect of freehold land here is splendid.' Then she added hastily, 'But it's not just the land we've come for. My husband believes in freedom and equality for all religious groups as is promised here. We want to bring up our children in the ways we believe to be right, but we want others to have the same freedom.'

'Is that so,' said Mr Parker who had never given the matter much thought. 'You certainly seem to have a good, orderly family, Mam. You are very fortunate.'

'Yes we are. So many children have been screaming and shouting and rushing about like mad things ever since we arrived.'

'Don't you worry, Mam. They were like caged rabbits for more than a hundred days on the ship, you know. They'll soon settle down. Never fear, Mam. Never fear.'

'And what are you going to do, Mr Parker?' asked Annie Popple politely.

'I like it *here* you see.' Mr Parker stuck out his chin and fiddled with his moustache. 'They'll soon have to build wharves, sheds and all that kind of thing. The place will fairly hum with commerce, Mam. Fairly hum. There'll be plenty to do, you know. Plenty to do.'

'Yes, I'm sure there will.' Mrs Popple tried to shake more sand out of her dress as she thanked her friend. 'Now, I must try to wash the sand off that poor child's face.'

Kate and Lucy May sat near their camp fire, carefully sipping a small ration of water from their pannikins. People around them walked and talked, shouted and joked, chopped and hammered, cooked and washed up. Pale twists of smoke rose between thin trees, and savoury smells mixed with the pungent new smell of gum leaves drifted on the evening breeze. A man whistled and a baby cried.

'Did you see the Jones's new hut?' asked Kate.

Lucy May didn't answer. Her eyes were sore and her face

still felt gritty.

'The Sampsons have two tents up now.'

'Kate,' said Lucy May suddenly, 'Do you know what I saw a little while ago? Two little black girls playing with a long loop of string and making it into lovely shapes with their fingers. I'm going to find out how to do it.'

'Did you go past the Tatsons this afternoon?'

'And I found a funny thin insect like a piece of stick, and followed a curly sort of track until it went under a log.'

'What were the Tatsons doing?'

'What sort of animal do you think made that track?'

Kate tossed her head. 'Doesn't matter.' Then very loudly and clearly, 'Did you see the Tatsons?'

Lucy May looked solemnly at Kate. 'Oh yes. I heard Mrs Tatson say that she was quite worn out from holding the tent pole all morning. As soon as she let it go, the whole tent would fall down and she'd be half smothered underneath.'

'She should be like Mrs Pettiwell,' said Kate. 'She just sat on a stump in a bright pink dress while her servants ran about doing all the work.' Kate laughed and Lucy May smiled wanly.

'It's very fortunate for us that your father's so handy with tools.' Mrs Popple smiled too. 'I don't think Mr Tatson ever used a saw or a hammer before. The city folk are going to find life here much harder than we farming people. Kate, *do* watch Tob and stop him from toddling too near the fire.'

Dogs and children frolicked about, churning up the sand, and a flock of red and green parrots squawked loudly. Pots and pans clattered and angry voices joined the din.

'That must be the Jamling family again,' Mrs Popple felt her foot. 'Run and ask them if they'd like some tea.' As Kate dashed off, she added, 'And come straight back please.'

'Of course, Mama.'

Annie Popple bent over the fire, carefully holding back her long skirt and petticoats. Several people had been badly burnt at camp fires, and a baby who had fallen into one cried constantly. A black pot in which a little water hissed hung from a tripod over the fire. A hole close by, partly filled with hot coals, held the camp oven with more coals heaped on its lid.

Lucy May followed her mother and sniffed hopefully.

'There's a new sort of smell, Ma. What's for our tea?'

'Never mind. It's a surprise.'

'Is it a pudding? We haven't had a pudding for ever so long.'

'No. It's not a pudding.'

'Smells like a pudding' persisted Lucy May. Then she asked, her face shining, 'Could it be meat? Real meat?'

'I'm afraid not. You'll have to put up with salt beef and pork for a little longer. Oh do take Tob away. I nearly stood on his hand.'

Tears filled Lucy May's eyes and Mrs Popple almost cried too. Her foot hurt and her back ached. Fortunately, Kate bounced back shouting, 'I hate salt beef and mouldy taties, Mrs Jamling's ones are worse than ours.' She took a deep breath. 'Mrs Jamling says thanks ever so for the invite but just now everything's in a right awful mess and she wishes she'd never left home for this God-forsaken country and . . .'

'That will do Kate.' Mrs Popple couldn't help laughing before saying, 'Do try not to shout so. Now mend the fire or my surprise will spoil.'

'Oh look at the sun!' cried Kate as she threw a log almost

onto the oven, 'It's like a great big orange. May I go and watch it go under the sea?'

Mrs Popple nodded and Kate ran down to the beach, but Lucy May sat and poked the fire with a green stick. Soon, Kate rushed back, talking as she came, 'Do you think Pa and Ben are lost or something?'

Mrs Popple had been imagining all sorts of dangers along the road for some time, but managed to say calmly, 'I don't think so. But it gets dark so quickly in this country. Anyway, they should be able to see the lovely fire you both helped to make.'

'Our fire's in a sort of hollow,' Kate said. 'They may not be able to see it. Oh look! Tob's biscuit's all over dirt and flies. Does it matter?' She thought for a moment. 'I know. I'll make a flag and tie it to the top of a tree. They'd see that.'

'You know you're not allowed to climb trees, Kate.' Her mother was looking for something in a box. 'But I suppose you could make a flag.'

'I hate being a girl. And sewing's awful.' Kate stamped her foot. 'I know.' She brightened up again. 'I could make a flag from the petticoat I tore yesterday.' She saw a wonderful opportunity to get rid of one of the five petticoats she still had to wear.

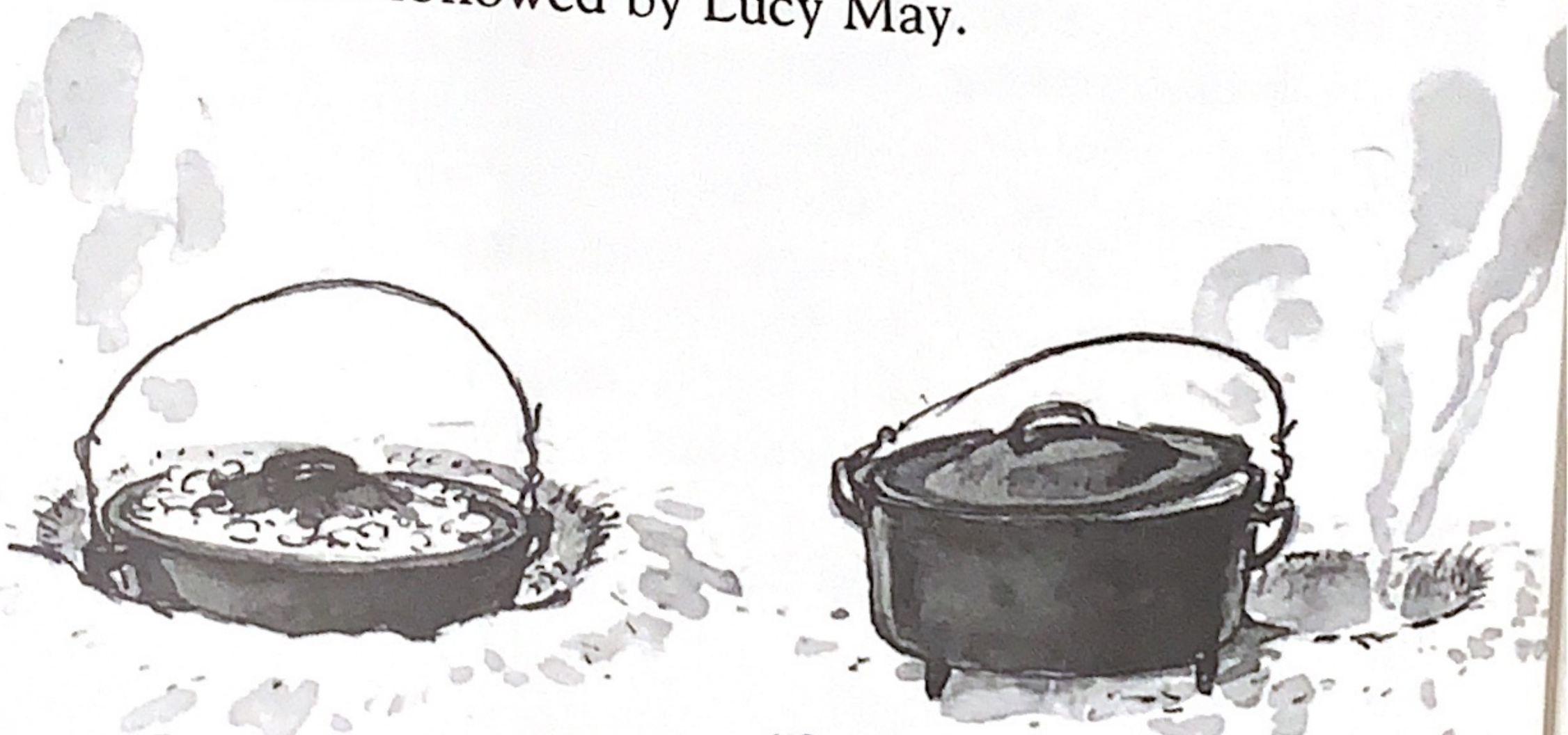
'And you could put a moon on it from Ben's old oily shirt.' Lucy May was suddenly interested.

'I don't want a moon, and moons aren't blue anyway.'

'This one is. Listen!' They heard a distant whistle. 'That's Papa.'

'Thank God,' murmured Mrs Popple.

Kate tried to whistle back, going red in the face. Then she darted off followed by Lucy May.



Chapter 2

Camping

'Let us give thanks to Almighty God for his goodness and bounty,' said Mr Popple solemnly.

The family had gathered for the evening meal in the dim light. Arthur Popple sat at the end of their outdoor table with the big black Bible beside him. At the side, Ben, Kate and Lucy May tried to find comfortable places on a plank nailed to two tree stumps, and Annie Popple, on a kitchen chair, held the wriggling Tob. Clara's place was empty as she was still in bed in the tent.

The children looked at their tin plates that held the usual old salt beef, the usual old potatoes, and a mysterious squashy vegetable. They all bowed their heads as Mr Popple said a special long grace. The children, who did not feel at all thankful, peeped furtively at several strangers who strolled past. They were also interested in a small leg of mutton their father had placed on a box near the fire.

They began the meal in silence, chewing slowly. 'This stuff tastes quite good if you shut your eyes and hold your breath,' remarked Ben swallowing hard.

Ben was twelve, two years older than Kate, and had the same grey-green eyes but was fairer and slimmer. His shirt, jacket and long, tight trousers were dusty and rumpled after his walk—like his father's.

'How could you be so rude?' exploded Kate with her mouth full. She had not complained, so felt very virtuous.

'Behave yourselves there,' said their father severely.

'What are the greens, Mama?' asked Lucy May politely.

'Boiled saltbush dear. Mrs Thomson tried some yesterday and said it made a welcome change.'

They all munched doggedly until Mrs Popple exclaimed, 'Good gracious! How could I forget part of my surprise?' She brought a bottle of Aunt Mattie's pickle to the table. They all took large spoonfuls and the food disappeared like magic.

'And now for the other part of my surprise.' Mrs Popple limped towards the oven. 'Wipe the plates please, Kate.'

Mr Popple then noticed how tired his wife looked. He spoke sharply: 'Hurry up there, Kate. Arms off the table, Lucy May. The planks tip up easily you know.' As his wife put a small pie in front of him he said, 'A fruit pie! There's nothing I like better.'

'The last of the apples in the barrel,' she explained, 'with the little wild ones the children found yesterday. They taste just like blueberries. And there's something else I found in the trunk. Oh look!'

A spotted, yapping dog and a big black one dashed past the table in a whirlwind of dust. The black dog wheeled, ran back to the box by the fire, and, standing on his hind legs, snatched the leg of mutton.

'Our meat!' yelled the children as the dog dashed away again. Ben and Kate rushed after the thief. They stumbled over hard tufts of grass, ran round stunted bushes, under trees and past tents and huts.

At last they found the black dog and a fierce, yellow mongrel having a tug of war with the joint. Ben, shouting angrily, grabbed a stick and tried to swipe the dogs, while men, boys and other dogs joined the fray.

'Stop bashing my dog!' thundered a huge man through the din.

'He's got our meat!' roared Ben, hitting out again.

A man came running with a bucket of sea water. The black dog yelped and sprang into the air as the water sloshed over him, while the yellow dog leapt about blindly. A little skinny cur snatched the prize, but in doing so ran slap into Ben's legs. Ben swung the dirty and tattered joint into the

air with the little dog hanging on to it.

'Drop it, you!' screeched a boy.

Fortunately, it was the dog that dropped it. Ben then seized Kate by the arm. She had been shouting and jumping with excitement, and was annoyed when Ben tried to pull her away.

'Come on silly,' he hissed, 'or there'll be trouble.'

Back at the camp fire Mrs Popple took one look at the mangled joint and began to cry. 'Our . . . our first real meat . . . and it's all spoilt.'

'We can save some of it, my dear.' Mr Popple led his wife to a cushion on a log. 'Ben, wash it in the sea. Then it can be boiled.'

Ben paddled in the cool, rippling water and admired the ships in the Bay. Like his mother, he felt homesick for Yorkshire.

When he returned to the camp, his father was smoking his pipe and talking about Adelaide. A flicker from the fire lit up his sunburnt face, greying hair and brown beard. His tight-fitting jacket hung from a branch behind him.

'Adelaide's not much of a place,' put in Ben. 'Just tents and huts scattered about. The river looks good though. I explored a bit while Pa was finding out about huts and cottages. I'll go fishing there as soon as I can.'

'There were not many cottages to let or sell,' continued Mr Popple who disliked interruptions, 'but I managed to buy an unfinished one.' He was staring into the fire, so did not see the dismay on his wife's face, or the surprise of the children. They had so looked forward to living in their "section house", and

had often talked about it. Its wooden walls and floor boards had been carefully cut and labelled, and doors and window-frames packed ready to be put together. They were all going to help to build it.

'I decided to sell the section cottage,' continued Mr Popple, picking up a smouldering stick to re-light his pipe, and still staring into the fire. 'There's scarcely any transport in the Province, and hardly any animals at all.' ('Except dogs,' said Kate under her breath) 'It may take days, even a week, to get a cart or wagon to take our few belongings to Adelaide. It will be much too costly to transport a house just now.'

Mrs Popple was very upset. 'But Arthur, we decided that bringing a house with us was the best thing to do. I know it's small, but it will be comfortable. I've even planned where to put the furniture, and I thought . . . we all thought . . .' There was silence so she continued, 'What sort of cottage have you bought? How many rooms are there? Is there a stove?' She stared at her husband. 'And what do you mean by "not finished"? This is rather a shock Arthur.'

At last Mr Popple looked up. 'Well my dear . . . to tell the truth, the cottage is a poor one, but we need a roof over our heads at once, and it was a good bargain.' He looked at the gloomy faces round him, 'It won't take long to improve the place, and I'll build a couple of rooms on to the back.' He could not hear what the children were saying to each other as he finished, rather doubtfully, 'I did it for the best you know.'

Annie Popple looked round at the children's shocked faces. 'Well, it's done,' she said slowly, 'so we must make the best of it. But the children must get to bed now. I'm afraid you'll have to sleep in the barrel again Ben. The girls have put more grass in it and there's some canvas to cover your feet. Come and kiss us good night.'

Next morning, no one mentioned the new cottage, though they were all wondering about it. Clara was feeling well enough to get up, though she still looked rather weak. Grace was said before and after breakfast, and the Bible was in its place again. Mr Popple reminded his family that he expected proper behaviour at all times. The children should be friendly, but must keep away from the crude fellows who

were such a trouble on the ship. 'But much more important than that,' he said severely, 'Are you listening Ben? You are not to have anything to do with the Native people. They could be very dangerous.'

'But Arthur,' Mrs Popple sounded surprised, 'They seem so friendly and peaceful. 'Two women were very interested in our cooking yesterday. I'm sure we could soon teach them.'

'You must not trust them Annie. At least not yet until we are sure they respect our ways.'

'That doesn't sound very charitable, Arthur.' She added quietly, 'The children are most appealing.'

Lucy May and her mother exchanged smiles. 'Please Papa.'

'Yes, child.'

'I saw some of the little girls playing a lovely new game. I'm sure they'd show me.'

'What! Playing indeed! What a shocking idea! Under *no* circumstances are you to go anywhere near those people. Is that absolutely clear?'

'Yes Papa.'

'That is an order for all of you. It is of the utmost importance. Now *you* Kate. Your mother tells me she heard you using a naughty word yesterday. See that it does not occur again.'

'No sir,' muttered Kate, not daring to raise her eyes.

'Look at me Kate.' He waited. 'That's better. And now.' He looked round kindly although he did not smile. He seldom smiled. 'Help your mother all you can and look after Tob. Our Clara is better and we are glad to have her with us, but she must not exert herself too much. I shall go to the ship, try to sell the section house and order a bullock wagon for our move. Come with me Ben.'

Clara began to wash up while Annie Popple, using a small bowl of water, tried to clean Tob. Kate and Lucy May sidled away and pretended to be very busy making an untidy wood pile in a most inconvenient place. Then they gathered grass and leaves to make a carpet in the tent. 'Very healthy,' remarked Kate with great satisfaction. Around them, the voices of old and young in many accents and dialects rose and fell as the pioneers worked by their fires or looked for

wood and water.

'Another hot day, I shouldn't wonder.'

'Our tent's stifling already.'

'If only we had more water. They'll never build a town here.'

'At least the ground stays still under your feet.'

Mrs Popple's voice rose above the others. 'Come here, children.'

Lucy May and Kate went reluctantly, dragging their feet, but much to their surprise their mother said, 'You may have a little holiday today because you helped me so well yesterday. Would you like to go along the beach a little way?'

'Oh yes!' exclaimed Lucy May, and Kate added, 'Please could we take our luncheon?'

'Well yes.' Mrs Popple sounded doubtful. 'If you take somebody with you. It may not be safe on your own.'

'I know.' Kate jumped about. 'Could we take Hugh Tatson or Billie Jamling or Mr Parker's twins?'

'Try Billie first,' their mother said. 'Hugh may be needed to help with the tent again and the twins are rather wild I think.'

The girls scampered off and returned with the news that Billie would join them. Clara began to cut the lunch. She was pale and her head ached but she looked neat and fresh in her long, blue dress with soft white collars in three tiers. Although she was only sixteen, she had to work as hard as her mother. She felt thankful that she would not have to worry about the girls for a few hours.

'Now children,' said Mrs Popple, 'you must wear your shoes until you are some distance along the beach. And keep your sun-bonnets on please. Several people have had inflamation of the brain already.' She then put Billie in charge of the expedition and added more instructions.

'He's only five months older than me. I'm ten now.' Kate kicked a tea-tree root angrily. The others took no notice, so she followed them over the stringy grass and round the sand-hills to the beach.

Chapter 3

Sand and Grass

The three children turned south and walked on the hard sand by the sea's edge. Lucy May skipped ahead at first but stopped so often that she was soon left behind. Her pockets bulged with shells, cuttle-fish bones, seaweed and pebbles. Kate walked stolidly, mumbling to herself as she squashed the wet, brown seaweed with her heavy shoes. Squish! Squish! The squelching sounds were lovely. Billie undid his jacket, stuck his hands into his trouser pockets, and whistled softly.

Suddenly Kate stopped. She waited until her sister was within earshot and called, 'Come up here.'

'Walking on the soft sand's too hard,' protested Billie.

Kate took no notice. She walked up the beach to a low bank and sat down.

'Oh Kate! You promised not to,' said Lucy May rather out of breath and in a shocked voice.

'I did *not*.' Kate struggled with her shoes. 'Ma said I could paddle, didn't she? Well, I'm going to paddle. All day. See? And none of your tales, Lucy May.' She glared at her companions and then, much to Billie's consternation, pulled at something above her knees. 'I wore my false pantettes so I could take them off.'

Kate rolled her pantettes into a ball, dragged off her stockings and stuffed them into her shoes. Then she hurled them one by one into the bushes behind a burnt log.

'Nasty, horrid shoes. Look at the blister on my heel.'

'But . . . but you're not going to leave them behind?' Lucy May sounded more shocked than ever.

''Course not.' Kate tossed her head, 'But I'm not going to cart them about all day. I'll easily remember the burnt log and tree with the flappy bark.' She looked scornfully at the others.

'I'm going to take my boots off too. I'm allowed.' Billie sounded rather superior. 'I'll carry them, though, for I'd get an awful beating if I lost them.' He tied his boots by the laces and hung them over his shoulder.

'Quick! Look what I've found.' The excited voice of Lucy May came from the other side of the log. 'He's green on top and kind of rosy underneath.'

'That's not much.' Kate scarcely looked at the small creature. 'Aw! I've cut my foot.'

'Has anyone got a box or something for my dear little insect?' asked Lucy May hopefully.

'Here. Put it in my stocking.'

'Oh thank you Billie. I hope it isn't too hot for him in there.'

'Let's get back to the beach, for goodness sake,' grumbled Kate. 'The twigs and things are awful.'

'Yes. Let's go,' agreed Billie. Then he saw a scaly animal with scaly legs lying under a log. 'Look! That must be a lizard.'

'Which end's its head?' Kate poked timidly with a stick.

'Don't hurt him!' cried her little sister.

''Course I wouldn't hurt the thing.'

'It's my poke now. I found it.' Billie tried to take the stick from Kate.

'It's mine and I didn't have a proper go.' There was almost a tug of war.

'It's gone,' said Lucy May sadly, 'and its head was the other end.'

They walked and paddled again. Lucy May took off her shoes and stockings and Billie carried them for her. Kate muttered at intervals that it wasn't fair. Lucy May filled her

sun bonnet with treasures.

After a while, Billie grew tired of carrying her shoes so she tied them to her bonnet strings. Kate turned up the wide brim of her bonnet and jammed it on to her head. It looked rather like the tam-o'-shanter Billie was wearing. They all thought this very funny.

They enjoyed the smooth, blue-green sea, the long yellow beach and the cloudless blue sky. But Lucy May became tired and hungry and dragged behind again. At last, they came to a craggy headland with a platform of rock below it.

'Let's have luncheon here,' suggested Billie.

They found chains of small pools in the flat rock. In some of these, frills of green and pink seaweed swayed in the water. Other pools held small scuttling crabs and tiny fish, and in others sea anemones grew among small pebbles.

They sat with their feet in the water and ate hungrily.

'We must be the first people in the *whole world* to come here.' Kate was suddenly impressed by it all.

'Could be, but probably aren't.' Billie tried to sound wise in spite of a mouthfull. 'Settlers have been coming to Hold-fast Bay for over two months you know. Someone's sure to have come this far.'

'And those black children must have been here already.' Lucy May was thoughtful. Then she climbed out of the pool. 'Look over there! A fish with stripes on it. And here's a shell like a fan and . . .'

'Come and finish your luncheon,' ordered Kate.

'No. I haven't time.'

They all climbed rocks, stared into pools and teased sea anemones. Then Billie noticed the tide was coming in. Time to turn back.

They paddled and splashed over the beach again.

'I didn't know there could be so much sand.' Again, Kate was awed by the scene.

'The only beach I went to at home,' remarked Billie, 'had pebbles and rocks and no sand at all.'

'But they do have *some* sand in England,' explained Lucy May. 'Ma told me. When she was a little girl she went to a little beach where there was white sand and a curvy sea wall and little boats painted green and red and blue, and little narrow houses and little twisty streets.'

'Quite a *little* place.' Billie grinned, Kate giggled and Lucy May looked puzzled.

'My nose hurts,' she said after a pause.

'Same here.' Kate felt her nose carefully. 'And my face.'

'I can hardly see the ships in the bay.' Lucy May sounded tired.

''Tisn't a bay, it's a gulf,' Billie informed them. 'Captain Flinders found it and it's called the Gulf of St Vincent.'

'And Colonel Light's been sailing up and down mapping it,' added Kate not to be outdone.

'I'm going exploring when I grow up,' continued Billie striding ahead, 'and I'll find places Captain Flinders and Colonel Light haven't even seen.'

'Me too,' called Kate.

'Girls don't explore.'

'Well, I'm going to.'

'I'm thirsty,' said Lucy May plaintively.

Billie stopped suddenly and looked about him. 'There aren't many trees here so I don't think there'd be any water. But there may be some wild figs and we could suck the juicy stuff inside them. Come on.' He turned towards the land.

'Wait for me,' Lucy May called, 'I've got to put my shoes on.'

'Good idea.' Billie sat down and began to brush the sand off his feet. 'I'm not going without boots among the sticks and prickles again. Ow! Something's tickling my toe.' He found Lucy May's insect in his stocking.

By the time they had decided what to do with the insect, Kate had disappeared. Behind the beach, yellow-brown grass grey thick and high. The two children called and called but there was no reply. They walked a little further and shouted again. Lucy May's eyes filled with tears and Billie felt worried.

'Don't cry,' he said, 'Just stay here for a minute while I have a look.'

'Could . . . couldn't you climb that tree and look down from there?' She sniffed and rubbed her eyes on her sleeve.

'Not a bad idea.'

There was a rustle in the grass and Kate bounded out.

'Tricked you!' she laughed.

Lucy May did not smile.

'It's glor . . . underful,' Kate went on, 'Look! You do this.'

She ran and flung herself down. The long grass closed in and almost hid her.

The others followed and fell into the grass. They laughed as they ran, jumped and fell. Over and over again.

'You both hide,' suggested Billie as he shut his eyes and began to count.

Lucy May pushed forward trying to find a place where the grass grew specially long and thick. She took long strides, jumped and fell and jumped again. Then she crawled forward and rolled over. It was very hot and silent and she felt sleepy. How lovely it would be if she could stay there all night! She closed her eyes and lay still.

Lucy May woke suddenly and sat up. There was silence all round her. She tried to hurry but her feet kept slipping on the dry grass. She tried several directions, but somehow she always seemed to be in the same place. She was hot and perspiring and felt frightened. She might never be found! She tried to run, but slipped again. She shouted, 'Kate! Billie!' No answer. She fought her way through the grass, her breath coming in gasps. She called again, 'Kate! Billie! Kate!'

There was an answering call, and then another. In a few seconds, she almost fell on the two children who were standing in the shade of a small gum.

'What's all the fuss about?' asked Kate.

'I . . . I thought you'd gone back without me, and I was lost and . . . and . . .'

'We wouldn't do a thing like that,' said Billie. He looked at Lucy May's scared face. 'I shouldn't have let you go off on your own. Come on. Hold our hands and we'll go back by the sea.'

They walked briskly. In silence. Then trudged along. Still in silence.

'Looks like a thunderstorm,' Billie said, looking behind him.

'Oh do get a gate on.' Lucy May tried to urge the others along. 'There's still a long way to go.'

But instead of hurrying, Kate stopped and stared at the scrub. 'Heavens! I nearly forgot my shoes and things.'

'Wait till tomorrow. It's getting dark,' begged Lucy May.

'I've *got* to find them or Pa will whip me.'

'We haven't gone far enough,' declared Billie. 'It wasn't far from the camp, and there was a tree with flapping bark.'

Black clouds massed and a few drops of rain fell.

'This is the place, I'm sure, and I'm going to look.' Kate was determined.

'No. Don't go.' Lucy May shivered. 'It's going to pour with rain.' Lightning flashes. A roll of thunder. 'Please Billie, I can't go up there.'

'All right then. Let's run.'

'I'll catch you up,' shouted Kate as she plouged through the soft sand.

Thunder and lightning came together. Kate jumped. Then she peered into the undergrowth, groping about timidly, fearing snakes. '*All* the stupid trees have flapping bark,' she grumbled. She found one shoe and stocking, shuddered and stood still as something scuttled away in the grass. She remembered that she had thrown the pantettes near a burnt log. She rushed forward, tucked them under her arm, and looked about desperately. In a few moments, she found the other shoe and stocking, whipped them up and was soon on the beach again.

The rain fell in torrents. She was soaked and her swinging hair stung her face. Twice she dropped a shoe.

As she neared the big sand-hill, the wind and driving rain nearly pushed her over. The tent roof sagged, and spreading pools lay in the hollows. Dark figures near huts and tents stumbled and slipped as they tried to shove or pull all sorts of objects under cover. As Kate clung to a rope, the whole tent quivered in a strong gust of wind.

'It's going to fall down,' she shrieked.

Their tent was safe however, but with cracking and tearing sounds the Parker's tent split in two. Mr Parker was revealed sitting on a rolled-up mattress with his feet in a puddle. Kate laughed hysterically. Her father appeared.

'What on earth are you doing here Kate?' He looked closer. 'You're sopping wet. Go inside and get your clothes off.'

Her teeth chattered and she shivered uncontrollably. She went to sit on her bed. It was made of forked sticks which

held a framework of saplings with ropes laced across it. The rain had poured through the tent flap making a puddle so one of the sticks had collapsed.

'Come over here,' somebody called.

Kind hands guided her over and round a muddle on the ground. They pulled off her clothes and rubbed her hard with a blanket. 'Get another blanket, if you can find one,' came her mother's voice, 'and wrap her up tight.'

'Now lie here on Mama's bed. It's the only dry spot. And don't you dare move,' said Clara. Kate tried to obey but couldn't stop shivering. 'We'll have to pile things round you and on top.' Gradually the shivering stopped.

'The fire will be out by now and there was that leg of mutton for tea too.' Her mother's voice sounded far away.

Lucy May and Tob were wedged into the top of Clara's bed. The end of it was piled high with blankets, towels and clothes. For a while the hen coop was left there too. Lucy May scarcely dared to breathe, much less move, in case the poor hens fell off. Tob cried, so she sang to him.

Mr Popple and Ben huddled in a corner and were almost as cold and wet as Kate had been. Curled up in a cocoon of blankets, Kate was the only one who slept soundly through the night.

Chapter 4

Rum and Furniture

'Come on there. No shirking anywhere.' Mr Popple roused his family in the first light of the following morning, as usual. 'Work first. Explanations later.' He looked sternly at Kate. 'And no play until your mother gives permission. That means you too, Lucy May.'

Ben went to the sea for a wash. He raced back to tell his father that the ships had been blown up the Gulf. Their ship, the *Lady Ethel*, had run aground along the coast towards Port Adelaide and was listing a little.

'That's very serious. I must go at once,' exclaimed Mr Popple. 'Our furniture may have to be taken off straight away. This makes the move to Adelaide much more difficult now. Bullocky Bert will have to take his wagon through the scrub to the ship, land the furniture and then come back here for the rest of the things. He's not the most obliging fellow at the best of times, but I was lucky to find a bullocky at all yesterday.'

'Do take care of my good things; Arthur,' pleaded his wife. 'Father's dresser is quite valuable you know. And do look after Aunt Florrie's sofa. I promised her I'd take the greatest care of it.'

'Don't distress yourself my dear. Ben and I will do our

best. You can't ask more than that. Come on Ben. You can tell Kate what "listing" means later. But first, we must fetch two barrels of water on the new sledge I made. Your mother has a lot of washing to do, so she'll need it. Then we must be on our way.'

All over the settlement men and boys looked for dry firewood, re-built huts, thatched roofs and repaired tents. The women cleaned, cooked, tidied and did extra washing. The children ran about fetching and carrying, running messages, falling over and exciting the dogs.

'Over here, 'it either suns too hard or rains too hard,' said Lucy May.

Mrs Popple reminded the children that they must stay in the camp. 'I'm tired of the old beach anyway,' muttered Kate.

Clara rolled back her cuffs and began some washing. She always looked tidy and clean in spite of the meagre water ration. She had arranged her chestnut hair in little curls over her ears. Her mother's hair, she noticed, was not so smooth and glossy now, nor tucked so neatly into her cap.

Every few minutes Clara had to leave her work to wipe

Tob's streaming nose and try to clean his eyes. He wailed dismally.

A tall young man, whistling cheerfully came by. 'Morning Miss Clara.'

'Oh John!' Clara smiled and her cheeks turned a little pink. 'How nice to see you.'

John, a young sailor in a striped jersey and wide blue trousers had become a special friend of the family on the voyage. He had once saved Lucy May from being washed overboard by a huge wave, and had sometimes found time to play with the children. When Mrs Popple was ill he occasionally stole into her cabin with a glass of porter or a little arrowroot.

'Do you sail soon?' asked Clara wistfully.

'The day after tomorrow, I hope.'

'I'll . . . I mean we'll all miss you.' Clara hesitated and her cheeks turned a little pinker.

'I'll miss you too.' John found a box and sat down. 'But I'm coming back with my young brother and we'll settle here. Both our parents are dead you see.' Then he continued enthusiastically, 'This country has wonderful opportunities for young people, much better than England. Two men I know walked to Adelaide yesterday, and were offered jobs as shepherds for fifty pounds a year, and their rations as well. That's splendid!' He looked at Clara and his eyes shone.

'I'm so glad,' said Clara quietly, trying to make a lather in the hard water. John was not sure what she was glad about, but she went on, 'Papa thinks this place has great promise too, but I feel homesick.' She stared sadly into the distance.

'I know how you feel.' John was silent for a moment. 'You'll be better when you get some letters from home.'

Mrs Popple came out of the tent, her arms full of clothes. She greeted John fondly.

'Good morning Mrs Popple. I hope you are well. Look! Aren't those birds wonderful?' He pointed to seven black swans, their necks out-stretched as they flew in a V formation. 'I expect you'll be living in a grand house in the country when I return in nine or ten months' time. I hope I shall be able to find you.'

'I hope so too,' said Clara.

Kate and Lucy May found that washing day could be quite exciting. A fat boy stared at them and shouted cheeky remarks. Kate was about to slosh him in the face with a pair of wet trousers when Mrs Popple pulled them away from her. When their job was nearly done, a crowd of screaming children chasing a frightened pig tipped over a pile of the Popples' clean clothes.

'Oh no! I'll have to do the rinsing all over again.' Annie Popple nearly cried. 'It's such hard work and we have so little water.'

'We'll help Mama. It won't take long.' Clara and Kate gathered up the clothes.

Several other families were also struggling with their washing, and the drab bushes soon blossomed with an assortment of coloured garments.

'I say!' called Lucy May, very shocked, 'Just look at Mrs Tatson's petticoat with four patches on it.'

'Well, Gran used to have a big patch on hers.'

'Yes, *one*. Not *four*, all in different colours. It's not very nice.'

'It's lovely without walls or fences,' chatted Kate. 'We should never have known that Mrs Tatson wears . . .'

'Just look at Susie Jamling's pantalettes with great, big tears in them. Mama would never let us wear things like that.'

'That must be Mr Parker's flannel bandage he wears "over the bowels". I heard Mrs Parker saying . . .'

'Children, come here,' called their mother, who was not very pleased with the snippets of conversation she overheard.

Mr Popple and Ben walked along the beach and watched two ships returning to their anchorage, but the *Lady Ethel* seemed to be stuck fast. A rowing boat was about to return to the ship. A sailor demanded ten shillings for a place on the boat but after a short argument accepted six shillings. Mr Popple thought it a "monstrous price".

'Stay here,' he said to Ben, 'and make yourself useful to somebody. I can't take you yet.'

In a few minutes, another boat pulled in. 'Hey! You boy!' called a tall thin sailor in a faded blue suit. 'Help us with this.'

He and his mate, a fat man with a short, fat pigtail, dumped a barrel into the sea. 'Come on there.' The first sailor beckoned Ben. 'Roll a barrel of salt beef on to the beach.'

'And give us a hand with this one,' cried the second sailor as he jumped into the water and pushed the barrel over the hard sand. Ben had the more difficult job of dragging it through the soft sand. The sailors tipped several other barrels into the sea, then pulled and shoved a small one up the beach.

'Give us a hand with this one boy,' cried the second sailor.

'But what about *that* one?' Ben pointed to a cask that was slowly floating away.

'That? Doesn't matter. It's only flour.' The first sailor spat on his hands. 'This one now, it's got the right stuff inside it.' He grinned, winked and pretended to drink.

'But we need the flour,' protested Ben.

Sailor two turned suddenly to Ben. 'Do as you're told, can't you? Get heaving.'

It dawned on Ben that the sailors were drunk, although it was still early morning. He felt it would be wise to obey.

'Now,' said the first sailor as they came to the sand dunes, 'you can get back to those other barrels if you like. But me and my mate're staying here. We've got to drink to the health of this lovely Province. A good life to us all, and may we make our pile!' Then he added condescendingly, 'You're welcome to a drop or two when we get the stuff out, of course. Duke! Find a sharp stone can't you?'

At the water's edge, Ben rolled a cask to a safer place, and dragged the boat further up the beach. He did not know how to save the flour as he couldn't swim or row a boat on his own. 'It's a terrible waste when we're running out of food,' he thought.

Shouts and whip cracks interrupted his thoughts. The bullock team must be somewhere near. He was glad it had come so soon. But it was not the wagon he expected, but a smaller cart with sloping sides, like the hay-cart on their old farm. The cart was wedged in the sandy soil. The driver, cursing loudly, cracked his whip and lashed the straining bullocks again and again. The bullocks heaved but the cart didn't move.

The driver shouted hoarsely, 'What the hell have they moved the ship for? When I saw its masts in the wrong place I couldn't believe it. Chap back there said it was the storm. Why the hell can't they anchor their ships properly? What am I supposed to do?'

Ben tried to calm the driver and helped to collect branches and saplings to put under the wheels. They pushed and shouted and the cart moved a little. Then they gathered up the branches and spread them again. They pushed and shouted again and again. It was very hot and very still in the scrub.

'The load's too heavy,' gasped Ben, wiping the sweat out of his eyes. 'What's in those barrels?'

'Water for the ship, and I'm not throwing anything out either. I don't get paid unless I land the barrels on the beach.'

They shoved and pulled and dragged out the branches and thrust them down. At last they came to a level grassy patch between the sand-hills, where they rested the bullocks.

Nearby, the two sailors with two stones, a knife and much swearing had broached the ale barrel. They invited the driver to join them.

A couple of long boats had brought furniture, boxes and trunks to the beach where their owners stacked them on the dry sand. Mr Popple landed some furniture, but by the time he and Ben had arranged it, the boats had gone again. The two sailors were sitting with their arms around each other singing in a maudlin stupor. They refused to row their boat, so Mr Popple and Ben manned it themselves and rowed out to their ship.

They slipped and slid as they climbed on to the deck of the *Lady Ethel* where they were soon wedged between a jumble of sailors, gentlemen and labourers all plunging about as they looked for their own or other people's belongings. A labourer fell over a pile of timber. A sailor laughed and a fight began. Beds, tables, dressers, piles of bedding, boxes and bundles sprawled over the deck with an occasional crate of hens or guinea fowl sandwiched between. A pig squealed and a dog barked incessantly.

The sailors who lowered goods over the ship's side to the waiting boats below sometimes lost control of the winches. Bedding or furniture then fell into the sea. Ben watched a

feather bed floating away to join the drunken sailor's barrel of flour. He stumbled over ropes and sails, stores and furniture, and followed his father down a narrow ladder into the foul-smelling hold. Knocking his shins on sharp corners and groping about in the horrible darkness, he almost vomited. He shuddered as rats scurried about in a corner. He was thankful when his father put a heavy box on his shoulders and told him to go aloft.

Ben picked his way to the stern where he gulped in the fresh air. His father soon joined him with a pile of belongings. He looked about anxiously and almost swore. 'All the small boats going back to the beach are full, so we're stuck here. I'm sure that's our bullock wagon by the sand-hills. Someone's bound to take it before I can get ashore. Some people have no conscience, you know.' Mr Popple stamped about and tugged at his moustache.

They waited impatiently for nearly half an hour until Ben, who had explored the deck several times, found a half-empty boat about to leave. He called his father.

'Hi there!' shouted Mr Popple, 'Will you take a box and a couple of pieces of furniture? I'll pay you extra.'

The sailors argued for a moment, then one called through cupped hands, 'All right. If you can find a fellow to work a rope and your box isn't too heavy.'

'Fetch the box, a chair and Aunt Florrie's sofa, Ben,' cried Mr Popple excitedly, 'I'll try to find a sailor and keep an eye on the two below. You can't trust them you know.'

On the beach, Mr Popple re-arranged his belongings, while drunken laughter and loud singing continued from the revellers on the sand-hills. The first bullock driver sat and swayed slowly while chanting to himself, and the second driver, Bullocky Bert himself, staggered about singing at the top of his voice.

'Curse the drink. It'll be the ruination of the Province,' said Mr Popple with disgust. 'They won't be fit for anything till tomorrow.' He looked about him and added gloomily, 'We'd better go, I suppose. If other people can leave their things here, I dare say we can. Don't say anything to your mother about the sofa unless she asks you. Come on.'

Chapter 5

Sticky

'When are we going to move to Adelaide?' asked Lucy May after grace next morning.

'Tomorrow at the earliest,' answered her father. 'Some of our things on the ship are missing, and a lot will depend on the bullock drivers. But I'll give you my plans now.' He waited to see that the children were listening properly. 'It's a good six or seven mile walk to Adelaide. It's sure to be hot and there isn't a proper road. You three girls will be able to follow wheel marks for most of the way.'

'Do . . . do I have to walk?' Lucy May sounded disappointed. She had imagined that she would sit beside Tob and the hens on top of the luggage and furniture and have a wonderful ride.

'Certainly you must walk, my child. Our load will be far too heavy as it is. Besides, you can walk twice as fast as a bullock you know.'

'Please, Papa, that's not exactly right.' Kate felt very brave because she dared to contradict her father.

'What's not right, my girl?'

'About us going twice as fast as bullocks.' Kate wriggled and screwed up her face because her foot had gone to sleep. 'Bullocks don't keep stopping to pick up sticks and leaves

and half dead insects and things. It's awful trying to get Lucy May along.'

Mrs Popple smiled encouragingly but her husband said seriously. 'You must walk along properly. You will find the house, light a fire and be ready to help us when we arrive.'

'But how shall we find it?' asked Kate anxiously.

'I'll explain to Clara and draw her a map. There's a little lane opposite our house, and I knotted my tie to the hinge of the door.' He turned to his wife. 'Have you anything to say my dear?'

'Well, yes, Arthur. The children must wear their sun-bonnets and understand that Clara is in charge. They will need an adult on so long a journey.'

'Never thought of Clara as grown up,' remarked Ben.

'Of course she's grown up!' exclaimed their mother. 'She's sixteen now. Why, I was married when barely seventeen.'

Lucy May was very impressed but Kate had a nasty jolt. She must be more than half grown up herself, and would soon have to behave in the stuffy, proper way of adults. Not that Clara was stuffy of course, but she was rather serious.

'Our Ben will have to stay here and look after the things that do not fit on to the wagon,' announced Mr Popple.

'I do hope we don't have to leave any good things, Arthur. Especially the mattress and the sofa.'

'Calm yourself, Annie. You shall sit on your feather mattress all the way to Adelaide, I promise.' Mr Popple then looked at Ben. 'Your mother will need more wood chopped and more water fetched, and is sure to have some other jobs waiting too. Then in half an hour or so, you can follow me. I shall go back to the ship for the rest of our belongings almost at once. Now, you two girls,' their father gave them one of his rare smiles. 'Your mother says you behaved very well yesterday. So you may come along the beach with me for a little way and watch the new settlers disembarking from the *Clarendon*, the new ship that has just arrived. When Ben comes along you must return. Is that clear?'

'Yes Papa.'

'Now Clara, finish your letter and then sew up the calico bag and I'll hand the mail to the captain.' Then he added solemnly, 'May the Lord bless and keep us all.'

'Amen,' they chimed.

'The scattered trees here are a dull and monotonous green' wrote Clara. 'Untidy strips of bark dangle from their trunks and the whole countryside is untidy. The sky is a glaring blue nearly all the time. Children and adults wander close to our open-air parlour and some of the children are quite bold.

'There is a friendly feeling however, and gentlefolk and labouring people help each other. The other day, a lady's skirt caught on fire, but a labourer and a boy saved her by rolling her in a strip of carpet. Two kind Blacks stopped the fire from spreading by treading out the smouldering grass with their bare feet. Several reed huts have been burnt and children sometimes fall into camp fires.

My hair does not curl very well in this dry climate, and I am very tired of my old dresses. My new one with the big, puffed sleeves is quite unsuitable. I do hope it is a little more civilized in Adelaide.'

Clara ran to Tob who had tangled himself up in a coil of rope.

Ben sauntered along the beach. Some of the immigrants from the newly-arrived ship had landed, and little boats plied between their ship and the beach. The sailors jumped into the water and carried the ladies to dry land. Some of the ladies looked very smart in silk dresses and elaborate bonnets, while others clutched dainty parasols or little parcels. One or two of them screamed faintly as the sailors picked them up. Ben waded to a long boat and carried some of the children.

As the new arrivals gathered together, the captain said in a booming voice, 'Let us now give thanks to Almighty God for his care and protection from the perils and dangers of the deep during the last one hundred days.' The people then fell on their knees as the captain read part of the Church of England service and offered a prayer.

Ben and his family had taken part in a similar service a few days before. Ten or twelve gentlefolk had stood a little apart from the thirty or forty labourers and craftsmen and their families. The South Australian Company had organized the settlement so that immigrants included builders, carpenters, farmers, gardeners, vine-dressers, shepherds, shop keepers, and other people with special skills.

The city itself, on the south side of the River Torrens, had been planned and surveyed by Colonel Light. It had straight streets and five squares. The settlers were able to get "sections" (blocks of land) at low prices, and those in need were given free food and housing for three weeks.

Ben, like his father, thought the Province would be a great success. He continued along the beach towards his own ship, forgetting his sisters. He was worrying about the bullock wagon that would now have to travel through unexplored scrub between the beach where the furniture had been landed and the camp. So he left the beach and walked through the bush, hoping to find a route for the following day.

Much to his surprise, he heard two voices ahead. 'Oh don't! You'll hurt her poor leg more.' An alarmed voice.

'Well, why don't you push or pull or do something?' An impatient voice.

'Where are you?' shouted Ben.

Silence. Then the first voice came rather timidly, 'Here. Round this sprouting stump.'

'Can't see the stump.' Ben grumbled as he stepped over and round sharp brown grass, scraggy shrubs, bent saplings and dreary she-oaks. Then he saw his two little sisters. 'What on earth are you doing here? You were told to go straight back to Mama.'

Kate took a long breath: 'We looked at the boats and then we looked for cockles only there weren't any and then we followed a bird with red on its wings and stripes on its tail

and Lucy May said it was a macaw and I said it wasn't because they have yellow and then . . .'

'We found this poor goat,' interrupted Lucy May. 'Its leg's all dirty and bloody and horrid.' Her voice trembled.

'It's got jammed by a root across a hole,' explained Kate. 'Please help us Bennie.'

'Don't call me Bennie. Mind out of the way Lucy May.' Ben looked carefully. 'Poor thing. All skin and bone. Going to have kids too.'

'Is she? How do you know?' Lucy May was very excited.

'Well, look at her.'

Lucy May was thoughtful. 'Like our cows at home. But the hens . . .'

'Oh Lucy May! You must know about that by now.' He looked at the goat again. 'I'll try to free her leg. But have you given her any grass?'

''Course we have. She gobbled it at first and then wouldn't eat any.'

'She must be dying of thirst. She must have water.'

'We know. But we can't go back to get any. Mama would stop us from coming back here.'

'Very well. Her leg's in a horrible mess.'

'Please don't hurt her Bennie.' Lucy May fluttered about like an anxious hen.

'*Don't* call me Bennie.'

'Sorry Bennie . . . er, Ben.'

'Now keep out of the way in case she butts you. I'll try to cut the root with my knife.'

Kate's eyes gleamed. She longed to have a knife like Ben's. She had tried to borrow it so often that she had been made to promise that she would never touch it. She watched enviously as Ben slowly cut the root. The goat plunged about at first, although Lucy May tried to soothe her.

'Now hold her steady. Both of you. That's it.' Ben felt the leg gently. 'I don't think it's broken, but it will have to be tied up. Do you want to take her back with you?'

'Yes please Ben.'

'She's our goat because we found her.'

Ben said firmly, 'Someone must have lost her. You'll have to wait and see if she's claimed. Anyway, she may not be able to walk as far as the camp.'

'I'll give her a slice of my petticoat for a bandage.' Kate saw a splendid opportunity to get rid of another of those tiresome garments. 'But I'll have to cut it myself.'

Ben explained that he would have to cut the material at the seams, but Kate could tear the rest.

Kate laughed. 'It sounds just like the Parker's tent splitting.'

Ben worked with careful, strong fingers. When the leg was bound up, Lucy May, with tears in her eyes, hugged him and whispered, 'You're real clever Ben. Better than the surgeon on the ship.'

'Someday,' began Ben with a far-away look in his eyes, 'I'm going to be a surgeon.'

At this, both children felt more shocked than when their father had announced that he was going to sell the section house.

'Oh Ben! You never would.'

'We . . . thought you'd be a farmer like Papa and Grandfather and . . . and we've come all this big long way so we can have a really big farm and,,'

'All right, all right.' Ben looked confused and turned red. 'I shouldn't 've said it. Don't ever tell Pa. Promise.'

'Promise,' said Kate gruffly.

'Promise.' Lucy May sounded scared.

'Now.' Ben became matter of fact again. 'Try to find some soft grass to offer nanny. A little at a time. Clear spaces in front of her, Kate, and hold back sticks and twigs. Stay near her head, Lucy May, and talk softly to her. I may be able to lift her back legs a bit and help her to walk.'

After a short struggle, the goat stood uncertainly on the beach.

'Now for the sticky part,' Ben continued, 'We may not be able to get her much further without help. She's so thirsty she'll probably make for the sea. We must stop that what ever we do.' He looked at the sea. 'Heavens! I'd forgotten the ship and the bullock driver. You'll have to manage on your own.'

'But we can't possibly . . .'

'Yes you can.' He did not look back.

The girls felt badly let down. Then they concentrated on their task. They tried to feed the goat again and to urge her

on. But she refused to move in any direction. Kate soon became quite desperate and flourished a stick threateningly.

'Don't hurt her poor sticking-out behind!' cried Lucy May.

Kate thought for a minute. Sticks, sticky and sticking. She marched ahead and put her hands on her hips, as Clara sometimes did when lecturing them. 'Very well, Sticky. Either you come with us or stay here and eat sea water.'

The nanny lurched forward and began to lick Kate's shoe. Kate was so startled that she backed away. The goat followed.

'Keep walking, even backwards.' Lucy May jumped up and down vigorously.

Kate suddenly discovered that there was something rather fine about her shoes after all. She stumbled backwards, then stopped and held out some grass. The goat made slow and wobbly progress as Kate kept retreating and Lucy May frantically gathered more grass.

Billie and some of his friends were hunting and tracking in the sand-dunes near by. They watched the strange sight and laughed heartily. 'Men,' cried Billie, 'shoulder your blunderbusses and bring the captive animal home.'

Shouting and waving their sticks, the boys joined the two girls. The goat stared with frightened eyes, then staggered on. As they neared the camp, other children milled round. Billie tied a piece of rope to the goat's neck and he and Kate

dragged her for the rest of the way.

In the settlement, all was happy confusion. Some of the new immigrants were looking for camp sites, others stood around talking and laughing, while children and dogs scrambled about. The older inhabitants drank in news from home with innumerable cups of tea.

Sticky the goat hobbled along and seemed unable to stop, so the whole procession of children swirled through the camp, greatly adding to the turmoil.

'Oh lawks!' cried Mr Parker as the excited children almost ran him down.

'Merciful Mother of Heaven! The place isn't safe,' moaned old Mrs O'Grady.

And so the grand procession descended on the astonished Mrs Popple.

Chapter 6

Sailors and Labourers

'Taken your time haven't you?' snapped Mr Popple turning away from three labourers and glaring at Ben. 'Bullocky Bert is still sleeping off the effects of yesterday's orgy and refuses to be roused. These men loaded some of our things on the wagon while I fetched more from the ship, but I could have done with your help. I'm going back now for another load. Several things are still missing in the hold. Give the men this when they've finished.'

Mr Popple handed Ben half a guinea. Neither of them noticed that the big man winked and nudged the small man next to him.

Ben looked carefully at the wagon as his father was rowed away. 'But you've loaded the wrong things! You'll have to take them off.'

'We did wot we was told. Didn't we Bill?' The small man turned to the big, brawny one.

Big Bill strode forward, his square jaw thrust out, his bloodshot eyes screwed up and his breath thick with alcohol. 'Pay up boy, or it'll be real bad for you.'

Ben's temper flared. 'Unload the wagon,' he shouted, 'or I won't give you the money! My father . . .' He looked at the boat, but by then it was well away from the shore.

'Will you give us the money or won't you?' Big Bill clenched his fists.

Ben hesitated. 'No. I won't.'

'Then take that,' snarled Big Bill. He slapped the boy's face.

Ben reeled back, his cheek and eye stinging. Then he rushed forward, hitting out again and again. But the punches only reached the man's stomach, so the boy was easily knocked down. As Bill bent over, Ben sat up and swiped him in the jaw. Then he dived through the big fellow's legs and almost sent him sprawling. But a stinging blow knocked him to the ground again gradually, Ben realized that somehow the fight was still going on. He heard shouts and blows, hissing breath and now and then a groan. 'Take that! You big bully!' someone shouted.

Ben sat up with an effort. He could hardly see out of one eye. The two sailors he had met the day before had now come to his rescue, and were lashing about in fine style. One of the labourers lay on the sand and another was getting the worst of the battle. The tall sailor seized a frying pan that hung from the side of the wagon and swiped Big Bill on the head. Big Bill swayed about then suddenly crumpled up. The other labourer, his nose streaming blood, retreated under the wagon, cursing and swearing.

Ben, feeling sick and giddy, tried to thank the sailors. The tall thin one wiped his face on a huge handkerchief and cried, 'Good on you boy. I like pluck, I do.'

'We like boys that help us,' chimed the short fat sailor. He slapped Ben on the back.

Ben winced and the sea and sky spun round him. He stammered his thanks again.

'Think nothing of it boy,' said the tall sailor, swaying a little. 'Now let us meet.' He cleared his throat pompously. 'You see before you no less a person than the er . . . the Duke of Holdfast. Bow to our fighting friend, Duke.' The second sailor made an unsteady bow. 'As for myself,' continued sailor-one, patting his hairy chest, 'You may like to know that I am no less a person than the Earl of Port Adelaide.' He made an exaggerated bow and pulled his forelock.

Ben tried to smile through his cut lip. 'I'm Ben Popple.'

'Sir Benjamin for sure,' cried the jovial Duke, preparing

for another back slap. Ben managed to move away so they shook hands instead. They all shook hands. Several times.

'Now, step this way Sir Benjamin.' Earl bowed again. Ben looked anxiously at the wagon. Earl looked too. 'Those things not yours?' Ben shook his head. 'Come on Duke, we'll soon fix that.'

The sailors stumbled about trying to climb on to the wagon. Once safely on top, they slowly and systematically hurled everything to the ground, including some of the Popple's belongings.

'Splendid job Duke,' said Earl with great satisfaction, 'Now, follow me to the dining hall.'

'Certainly my Lord.' Duke made another wobbly bow.

Ben looked anxiously at the rum barrel. 'Don't worry, Sir Benjamin,' Earl assured him, 'Down with drink, sir. Never touch a drop after unloading. It's *food* now sir. We shall prepare a feast.'

Ben grew more cheerful. He felt his lip and jaw carefully and hoped he would be able to eat.

'Now light a fire,' ordered Earl, and Duke here will cook the viands.'

Ben looked for wood. He couldn't imagine what they would cook. Earl lit the fire. Duke picked up the frying pan, dusted it on his trousers and passed it to Earl. 'Somewhat dented sir after your fine work. But I think it will do.'

Duke milked a trickle of weevilly flour from a sack into the frying pan. Then he tripped over the sleeping bullock driver as he coaxed a little rum from the almost empty barrel. He sent Ben to get some sea water in a quart pot.

Duke solemnly mixed some of the sea water with the rum and flour and shaped a damper. He dropped this into the glowing coals and raked a few coals on top.

'That'll soon be done to a T,' he announced proudly. He then unwrapped a dirty and tattered handkerchief and produced a chunk of salt beef. He squatted by the fire, cut the meat into strips and warmed them in the frying pan.

When Ben looked about him again, he was relieved to see that the defeated labourers had all disappeared. Bullocky Bert was still snoring by his wagon.

Duke was slapping himself on the stomach and announcing, 'Now my lords and gentlemen (though unfortunately

not my dear ladies) dinner is served.' He hacked off pieces of leathery damper and arranged the singed meat on top. 'You see before you roast suckling pig, saddle of mutton, a brace of ducks, a partridge or two and ye olde plum pudding.'

The two sailors ate with relish, but Ben could scarcely swallow. He longed for a mug of water. I know how that poor goat must have felt, he thought. He buried some pieces of damper and meat in the sand when his hosts were not looking. The sailors entertained him with wonderful stories.

'Spent any time at Kangaroo Island lately?' asked Earl, spluttering over a piece of damper.

'No. We came straight here after calling at Rapid Bay.'

'Not been to Kangaroo Island?' broke in Duke. 'Boy, you've not lived. Why the scrub there grows so thick you can't put your hand between the tree trunks. As for flour! There's none of the lovely stuff we have here.' He jerked his thumb towards the sack. 'We got some flour once from Americy. (We 'd been living on fish and nothing else for three months mind.) The flour was so hard we had to chop it with a axe. Then we had to beat it and grind it for a month before we could eat it. True, ain't it Earl?'

'True as . . . as . . .' Earl chocked over a piece of meat.

'Hit him on the back with the frying pan,' ordered Duke handing Ben that useful object.

'Been to Port Adelaide then?' asked Earl, swallowing with difficulty.

'Er. No. I'm afraid not.'

'What? Never been a few miles up the coast?' Earl coughed again as he found a piece of damper in the sand and dusted it on his shirt. 'Boy . . . er, Sir Benjamin. You've really missed something. Next time you get a bit hungry like, just go to Port Adelaide for a oyster or two. Grow under the mangroves you know. Why the oysters there'd be . . . er . . . how big would you say, Duke?'

''Bout six inches across.' Duke spread out his hand and winked.

'Six inches! A oyster from there'd be more than *ten* inches, if it was a day.' Earl smacked his stomach and beamed at Ben.

The two sailors continued to tell similiar stories until Ben noticed that the sun was low over the sea. There was still

no sign of his father. He explained that he must return to help his mother.

'Sure. Go to the aid of the lady mother,' agreed Earl struggling to his feet. 'But a little drink before you go.'

Ben felt giddy as he stood up and his face didn't seem to be in the right place. He asked his friends how he could prevent anyone from putting the wrong things on the wagon again.

'Duke here will fix that,' said the obliging Earl. 'Stir up the bullocky, Duke.'

Bullocky Bert was snoring happily but Duke soon kicked him awake.

'Go on. Move,' ordered Earl. 'Bring that lot from over there and stack up your blasted wagon. There's an extra half guinea at the end, if you're lucky. Go on. Move.'

Ben pointed out which things belonged to the Popples and which did not. The sailors helped a little and promised to keep an eye on things. Ben thanked them and took a wavering course through the sand back to camp.

Mr Popple didn't get back to the tent until late that evening, having finally rounded up most of their furniture from the ship. He was tired and very short-tempered.

Chapter 7

Walking to Adelaide

Despite Mr Popple's misgivings, Bullocky Bert did find his way to the camp next morning. He arrived with his wagon as the day dawned clear and hot. Children and adults worked for a couple of hours dragging and carrying all sorts of objects from the camp to the wagon. Mr Parker stood and watched but volunteered to help Ben who was staying behind to look after the tent and a few pieces of furniture that did not fit on the wagon.

'Don't worry. Don't worry dear friends,' he cried, whisking away the flies with a leafy twig. 'If anyone leaves with half a load, Ben and I will pop your tent on it. I'll bring the furniture later. Ben can have luncheon with us after he's tidied up. Just leave everything to me.'

At first, Mr Popple refused to take Sticky as a passenger. But the children and his wife begged so hard that he put her in a box next to the hen coop at the back of the wagon. A tin trunk with the feather matteress on top made a seat for Mrs Popple, and Tob sat on her knee. Aunt Florrie's sofa, piled with bedding, was placed behind her.

Several other families were leaving, so goodbyes and good wishes sounded on all sides. 'See you soon, folks. See you soon,' called the jovial Mr Parker waving his branch. Ben,

looking rather forlorn, stood beside him.

The driver shouted and cracked his long whip. The bullocks lurched forward. The wheels creaked and groaned. Lucy May, Kate and Clara walked beside their father for a while. Then they went ahead out of the dust.

Lucy May darted about collecting treasures, and soon lagged behind as Kate had said she would. She called, 'Wait,' or, 'Wait on,' so often that her sisters became impatient.

'You've got too many things already,' said Clara sternly. 'Let's catch up with the Jamling family.'

Red-faced Mrs Jamling, carrying her red-faced baby, trudged along doggedly. Mr Jamling pushed a hand cart piled high with his possessions. A crate of guinea fowl and a small frightened rabbit in a cage were tied on top. Two tall, thin and solemn daughters clutched baskets and bags. Billie was almost hidden under two bundles, while a kettle, frying pan and two pannikins clanked behind him. Mr Jamling kept stopping to puff and blow, wipe his perspiring forehead and wave off the flies.

'We're going on first,' Clara explained, 'We'll light a fire and get things ready.'

'Ma and Pa will soon catch you up,' added Kate, 'They're

just back there.'

'Folks with bullocks'll race us easy,' muttered Mr Jamling enviously.

'Oh come on,' cried Kate who liked to keep on the move. 'What on earth are you up to, Lucy May?'

'Trying to find some juicy grass for the poor bunny. This old grass's all dirty and sharp.' She tried to feed the rabbit. 'It's too hot for him and he's poorly, too, I think.'

'Pesky thing,' growled Mr Jamling.

'Wish I was a rabbit,' grunted Billie, 'not a blooming horse.'

'The bunny needs some shade or it'll die,' insisted Lucy May.

'Come on,' shouted Mr Jamling seizing the handles of the cart, 'can't be fussing over a blooming rabbit all day.'

Lucy May jumped and looked scared. Then she tilted her head back and stared at Mr Jamling. 'Please. Please wait a minute. I'll just tie my sun bonnet over the top so bunny can have some shade.' As Clara began to object, fearing inflammation of the brain, she explained, 'It's not very sunny for me. I'm used to it now.'

'Can you beat the young ones?' Mr Jamling dropped the handles as suddenly as he had picked them up. He began to mop, puff and blow all over again.

Lucy May climbed on to the cart and tied a bonnet string to one side of the cage while the tallest Miss Jamling tied the other. Lucy May carefully flattened the bonnet.

'It doesn't make much shade,' she said sadly.

'Come on Mother. What are we waiting for?' Mr Jamling moved on again.

They walked together for a while, but Kate soon became bored with all the stopping and starting. She suggested that they catch up with the people ahead. Lucy May left the rabbit reluctantly.

They passed several families. 'See you in Adelaide,' called an old man.

'See you too,' the children replied.

'Order a big stone house for me,' called a sad-faced little man struggling along with his wife and six children.

'Order a jug of ale,' 'And some spirits,' cried two men who sat in the shade of a skinny tree, sharing a bottle of wine.

Kate began a saucy answer, but Clara hurried her on. They passed an old woman bent over under a bundle of bedding. A sailor with ear-rings and a long pigtail led an over-laden donkey. 'Wait for me in Adelaide.' He winked at Clara.

She blushed, turned away and bustled the children more than ever. She thought of John, who was sailing for England that day. She would probably have to wait a whole year before seeing him again. Would he remember her, she wondered?

Kate was getting tired and Lucy May wanted to talk to the donkey. Clara scolded them, 'Oh please get a gate on. If you don't do better than this, I won't give you any luncheon.'

After this awful threat, they walked steadily for some time, Clara peering at the ground and looking ahead anxiously. Wheel marks on the soft earth showed plainly but on hard or stony patches there was little to guide them. A wisp of dust ahead indicated a bullock team.

'I reckon that's the Proud Pettiwells,' said Kate sourly. 'I heard Pa saying that Mr Big Pettiwell snatched the best team just as he was asking for it.'

'Oh, Kate! You mustn't speak like that,' protested Clara. 'I'm sure Papa wouldn't have said "snatched". Anyway, we gave a good strong team of bullocks.'

'I've hardly said anything all day.' Kate pouted, then tried to blow away the flies like Mr Jamling, 'and I haven't growled at all really. I was only saying . . .'

'Oh do stop, Kate.' Clara felt hot and tired. Then she said quietly, 'Look at those pink and yellow flowers over there. They're as big as a silver penny.'

Some screeching parrots flashed past.

'I'm going to tame a parrot when we get settled,' announced Lucy May. 'People shouldn't be allowed to put them in pies.'

'Well I like o'possums best,' Kate declared, 'and I'll catch one. I don't see why *you* should have all the wild insects and animals and things.'

'The Pettiwells don't seem to be moving,' said Clara, 'although it's hard to see from here.'

'Wouldn't it be fun if they'd broken down?' Kate grinned

at her big sister. 'Mean things, the Pettiwells.' She brushed her hair out of her eyes and rubbed her face on her long sleeve. 'I went past their tent one evening, and they had a great big feast spread out. Even their servant girls were stuffing themselves with new bread. They had slices of toasted snake too. Tasted like turkey they said. Young Smart Pettiwell said he'd eaten nine inches. And they didn't offer me *any*.' She shut her mouth with a snap.

'Please don't tell us again,' sighed Clara. 'No doubt it served you right for hanging about and trying to look hungry.'

'I was *not* hanging about.' Kate prepared for one of her long speeches, 'I just happened to be going past as I was sent on an errand you may like to know and I just stopped to er . . . to er . . . get some sand out of my eye and really and truly . . .

'Stop being so tiresome Kate!'

'Look! Something awful's happened to the Pettiwells,' exclaimed Lucy May.

When they came nearer, they could see that one of the large wheels of the wagon had come off. Boxes and trunks were slowly sliding down, while a number of objects lay scattered on the ground.

Kate stared with her mouth open. 'One of the bullocks looks dead and the other more than half dead.'

'Oh the poor bullocks!' exclaimed Lucy May, 'the nasty driver works them too hard.' She darted off but Clara managed to catch her by the skirt.

'No you don't, young lady. Just you stay here.'

'Look at Mr Big Pettiwell,' cried Kate excitedly.

Mr Pettiwell's face was turning from tan to purple. His eyes bulged as he shook his fist in the face of the bullock driver. The bullocky, shouting his worst language usually reserved for his worst bullocks, replied with two fists. Kate was fascinated and hoped she'd remember each word for some future occasion. Lucy May, however, was very shocked and expected the devil to appear at any moment.

Suddenly Mr Pettiwell became silent. He stood like a tin soldier. Then he fell backwards.

'O Lord!' gasped Kate, 'He's dead too.'

Fortunately, Clara did not hear. She was concentrating

on Mrs Pettiwell. That lady had been overturned with the baggage. She sat with a dazed expression on a bare patch of ground, her bodice half undone and her hair falling down. Her smart hat with poppies and wheat round the brim flopped over her nose.

The girls could not help laughing. Then Clara said, 'Sh! We shouldn't be laughing. We ought to help.'

'But the servants are helping already.'

'Well, yes. Let's go on.'

'Do you think Mr Pettiwell's dead?' asked Kate.

'No, I'm sure he's not,' said Clara briskly, 'I expect it was the heat.'

That reminded the children they were hot and thirsty. They begged for water. Just a little drink. Just a tiny, little one. Clara refused.

'Wait till we get to the edge of the forest. We'll have luncheon in the shade.' Then she added brightly, 'How many puffs of smoke can you see in the hills? Papa said that the Natives light fires to drive the animals from the undergrowth.'

'Here's some good shade,' Kate declared, 'and I'm not going any further.'

Lunch was dry bread thinly spread with pickle, and a small drink of water. They sat quietly for a while although the flies tickled their faces and hands.

Lucy May stared at the trees ahead. 'I wonder what Annabel would have thought of South Australia?' she murmured.

Clara gasped and said rather sharply, 'The same as we do, I suppose. Don't talk about her. We promised Papa that we would never mention her in front of Mama.'

'But . . . but Mama can't hear. I only wondered.' Lucy May's eyes filled with tears.

'It's all right,' said Clara quickly. 'But I think we should all try to forget. I didn't mean to be cross. Hold my hand for a little while.'

Lucy May blew her nose and moved closer to Clara. 'I just think Annabel would have been nice to play with. Better than Tob.'

'Tob will be more fun when he's older.' Kate tried to help. 'Anyway, one baby's enough for Mama.'

Tears came to Clara's eyes also as she remembered their little sister. Annabel, a happy two-year-old, developed a mysterious fever after they left Cape Colony, like several other children on the ship. The surgeon kept a small supply of medicines, but was also in charge of the wines and spirits. He drank much of the spirits himself and was little help to his patients, particularly the babies. Annabel had grown thinner and weaker until she could not swallow anything. Their mother had stayed in the cabin with her for six days and nights until the little girl died.

A funeral service for Annabel and two other babies had been held on the deck in the cold, screaming wind. The little bodies, wrapped in canvas, had been dropped into the sea, and the men as well as the women sobbed and wiped their eyes.

Afterwards, Mrs Popple lay on her bunk for several days, scarcely moving or speaking. Their father had then asked the children not to speak of their "poor departed little one" unless their mother mentioned her first.

Clara wiped her eyes. She thought again of John, who had been so kind to her mother after Annabel's death. Then she thought of Grandma. Grandma would have said, 'Now my girl, pull yourself together. You must not give way to your feelings like this.'

Clara looked at the children and at the mysterious countryside. 'Let's go into the forest,' she said, 'It looks cool and shady in there.'

Chapter 8

Adelaide at Last

The forest was not as dark and mysterious as it had looked from the distance. Kate and Clara chatted about the bright flowers, the strange birds and their new house. Lucy May did not say anything but kept looking about anxiously. She believed witches and wicked fairies hid behind the trunks of big trees in the woods. They might pop out at any moment and run away with her. She clung to Clara's hand and hung back.

'Oh come on Lucy May. You're making me tired. Look over there! There's something in a calico bag under that yellow bush.'

Kate scampered off and Lucy May followed.

'It's only a big platter and a kettle and . . .'

'Come over here,' shouted Kate, running further. 'There's a big bag of sugar and the bag's burst and there's ants all over it.'

Both children tried to brush away the ants and cram big handfuls of sugar into their mouths at the same time. They crunched and licked.

"Slovely.' Lucy May spoke with gritty teeth and sticky lips.

'Oo the ants taste awful.' Kate munched and then spat

out some ants. 'Oo they tickle.'

'Oh children, you shouldn't.' Clara sounded half-hearted. She carefully poked a finger into a hole free from ants. Then she munched and gulped and sucked like the others. The children soon pasted their faces with sugar, and dust and sticky blotches appeared on their dresses.

'Sugar. Lovely sugar.' Kate kept saying. 'Ow! An ant bit me.'

Lucy May licked round her lips. 'Couldn't 've. Only the big soldier ones bite.'

'Well it did bite me, and it wasn't a soldier one either. 'Ow! There's another.'

'What a shame! What a waste!' Clara looked about her.

'Pa could fit the sack on to our wagon,' suggested Kate.

'Certainly not.' Clara was the big sister again. 'It doesn't belong to us, and we shouldn't be eating it really.'

'But we found it. Like our goat,' argued Kate.

'What sights you look!' Clara reproved them. 'Come on now, or you'll be sick. Let's see what's on the other side of the forest.'

The children began to feel rather ashamed. Slowly, they licked their hands and wiped their mouths on their skirts. Then they went back for a last chew.

'There's something else over there.' Kate darted off. She found a box on a barrow, a roll of bedding and a little table wrapped in sacking.

'What a shame!' said Clara again. 'I do hope it doesn't rain.'

'Hardly ever rains,' grumbled Kate, 'Except when you lose your shoes.' She prodded the sacking then bounced backwards almost upsetting Lucy May. 'A snake!'

Clara grabbed her sisters and pushed them roughly behind a bush. They waited in silence for almost a minute. Then Kate muttered, 'We should've been allowed to bring Tim from our farm. Dogs are more use than silly hens or your cow that gets washed overboard.'

'What . . . what do we do if it comes after us?' asked Lucy May through chattering teeth.

After waiting a little longer, Clara said bravely, 'I'll just take a little peep. Kate imagines things sometimes.'

Kate felt very insulted and said she never imagined any-

thing. She stayed safely behind the bush, however, while Clara had a timid look.

'It's all right,' whispered Clara, 'Now creep behind me and don't wake it up.'

When they were at a safe distance she stopped and said severely, 'Kate, don't you go poking about into other people's belongings. As for you, May,' she stared at her little sister who always shivered when her name was shortened, 'don't go near *any* sort of snake—black snakes, brown snakes, spotted ones, even ones with legs. Think on.'

The forest soon thinned out and they walked briskly in open country, Clara leading.

'It's terribly hot and I'm sticky and thirsty. *Very* thirsty,' shouted Lucy May.

'I'm thirsty too,' chimed Kate.

Clara pretended she couldn't hear. Kate swished the flies angrily and stubbed the toes of her shoes into the ground. Lucy May stumbled several times before calling in her "sobby voice", as Kate often described it, '*Please* Clara. I can't go any further without a *little* drink.'

Clara waited for the children and smiled at them. 'Mama gave me a small bottle of water in case we got *very* thirsty. Shall we have it now?'

'Yes, *now*,' said Kate eagerly.

Clara carefully poured some water into their pannikin and said, 'Take little sips and hold the water in your mouth for a while before you swallow.' She could see that the children were very tired, and began to worry about the road. She had not seen any wheel marks for some time, or any abandoned luggage. Her father had said that boxes and bundles marked the road at intervals. No traveller had overtaken them either.

Clara thought: 'We must have gone too far to the right when we found that sugar.' After a moment's panic she thought of Grandma again and managed to say calmly, 'I think we should change our direction a little. We must go more towards the left.'

They went on gloomily, straggling like weary, half-starved sheep. Lucy May had a pain and was sick. Kate dragged her feet. She tripped and fell awkwardly.

Clara came to her anxiously. 'Are you hurt much? Let me see.'

Kate clutched her ankle. 'No. Don't touch it. Wait.' She tried to bite back the tears.

'What could you have tripped over?' The ground was bare and dusty. Clara looked about carefully. 'Hurrah! What good luck!'

'What a nasty thing to say when I've hurt my foot and I'm being real brave.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . . We would've missed it but for you. Look! A surveyor's peg. This must be a street or something.

'Lovely street. No houses. No shops. No people. Only pegs for you to fall over.'

Lucy May had gone ahead. 'There's a shepherd and some sheep over there.'

'Go and ask him where we are. Kate can't come for a minute.'

Lucy May jogged off. The shepherd waved.

''Scuse me shepherd,' she said in her best style, 'but please will you tell me if this is Adelaide?'

'In a manner of speaking, yes.' He puffed his pipe and scratched his head. 'This is the edge of the Park Lands, according to Colonel Light. End of the city sections is over there. Park Lands!' He said this scornfully, pointing in a circle. 'Why do we need Park Lands? Whole ruddy place's a park ain't it?' He removed his pipe and spat into the grass.

'Yes sir,' said Lucy May respectfully. She was used to the ways of shepherds. They either talked a great deal or ignored people completely. After a while she ventured to ask, 'Are those *your* sheep, shepherd?'

'Goodness me no. These are about half the sheep in the entire Province.' The shepherd gazed into the distance for some time then asked abruptly, 'And where may you be going?'

'We're walking to our house. Our father bought it for us.'

'Oh. And where is this house?'

'It's near the top of the hill with a little lane in front, and Papa's tie is on the door.'

'Is that so.'

Clara showed him her map.

'That'll be Polly's Lane,' he said. 'You'll find someone who'll know it.' He paused. 'But you've come too far east and south. It's a fair step from here.' The children looked upset so he continued kindly, 'Depends on how you go of course. If you walk slantwise, nor' nor' west like, you should come to Polly's Lane in a mile or so. See that tree?' He pointed to a gaunt tree with a patch of burnt grass round it. 'North from that tree should take you to your door.'

'Now. Let me feel that ankle.' He beamed at Kate. 'It's not too bad. You'll get there all right.'

Kate nodded and became so absorbed in trying to work out the nor' nor' west business that she forgot her ankle for a while. Clara thanked the shepherd and called Lucy May, 'Come on now. You can see the sheep some other time.'

They set off again very slowly, Kate limping and trailing behind, and struggled on for almost half an hour.

'Come on,' Clara encouraged them, 'Who's going to see the river first?'

At last they looked down a gentle slope to the town they had heard about for so long. A few huts and tents were dotted about, with a few stone houses among them. A curving line of trees indicated the River Torrens.

'That it?' Kate stared and pointed in disgust. 'That the place? Our village's better than that. It's got a pond and a green and two shops and . . . That's got nothing.'

'Never mind,' said Clara soothingly, 'We can't see properly from here. Let's find the house. Papa said the third one, with its back to the river.'

They scarcely glanced at a hut they passed, but they stood and stared at the third building. It was a little hut of twisted saplings with walls of caked mud and a roof of reeds. Its slab door hung from a leather hinge, and two empty windows gaped in the sagging walls. Bare earth and tufts of dried grass surrounded it. Mr Popple's tie hung from the door hinge, limply proclaiming that this was their cottage.

Their father had said that it was a poor, unfinished hut. But they had all expected it to be clean and comfortable. Kate had secretly imagined that it would be brightly painted and have trees around it. Each drew in her breath with a sob. Tears filled Clara's eyes, while Kate and Lucy May flopped to the ground and cried bitterly.

PART II

ADELAIDE 1837

Chapter 9

WATTLE AND DAUB

'Why bless my soul! What ever's going on here?'

Kate and Lucy May stopped crying immediately. A stout, kindly woman in a faded green dress smiled down at them.

'I guess you're the Popple children, eh?' They nodded. 'And you must be Clara.' They nodded again and wiped their eyes. 'You are beauties, aren't you? Why, you didn't even look behind the cottage did you?' They shook their heads. 'Things aren't so bad sometimes if you take another look. Now come with me.' The children scrambled to their feet. 'You must be half starved. But look!'

Behind the cottage, a kettle hung over a small fire. On a box near by was something smelling delicious, wrapped in a towel.

'It's . . . it's new bread,' exclaimed Kate. Then, in spite of her best efforts, tears poured down her cheeks again. She sat down and hid her face.

Clara began to scold her but the woman said, 'Leave her alone, dearie. Overtired she is. Hurt her foot, too. Now come with me.' She led the way to a small cask by the back door. 'See what your Pa did when he was here. (Clever man your Pa.) He put some water in the cask and made a lid (goodness knows where he found the wood) and he said,

"Maybe there'll be a little water left when my children come." And he was right.'

The lady in green smiled encouragingly. Then she patted her hair and tried to capture some unruly strands that had escaped from her cap. She rolled back her cuffs and continued, 'Now bring me that bowl, little one, and the towel beside it. Good. Here's some water, now wet the end of the towel and wipe your faces, then dry them on the other end of the towel. No drinking yet while you're so hot. Then sit yourselves down by the wall where there's some shade. But first, tell me your names.'

The girls did as they were told, and then their new friend poured some fresh water for Kate and handed her the rather grubby towel. Kate still found it hard to control her sobs and hoped nobody would talk to her.

They all watched while the woman sliced the bread. She

said simply, 'I'm Mrs Mac and I live further down the hill. Your father did me a good turn when he was here, so I said I'd look out for you. Now Kate, go and sit with the others and you can all have a good drink of water.'

When they had finished their thick slices of bread and tepid water, Mrs Mac said, 'Find the shadiest spot and lie down and rest. I must go now and make tea for my good man.'

But Lucy May and Clara were becoming more and more curious about the house, so they went round to the front and peeped inside.

'It's a queer cottage,' Lucy May reported to Kate, 'It's all one big room.'

Kate had found a tuft of grass for a pillow, and had shut her eyes. 'Is it?' she muttered.

The others lay beside her on the bare, dry earth, and were soon asleep.

The bullock wagon was almost at the front door before the girls woke up. The driver stopped the weary bullocks and mopped his sweaty forehead. Mr Popple pushed back his hair, brushed away the flies and looked about him with relief.

'Well, my dear,' he said to his wife, 'here we are at last. Safe and sound. Welcome to your new home.'

Annie Popple looked at the miserable unfinished hut and at the bare earth round it, and said with a sob in her voice, 'Oh Arthur, don't call it *home*. It can never be home to me.' She buried her face in Tob's blanket and cried.

Bullocky Bert was eager to get to his lodgings in the little wooden shack—the hotel—at the bottom of the hill, and thought longingly of warm brown ale. He hastily began to pile the family's possessions on the ground. The children helped and Kate almost forgot her ankle. Mrs Popple brightened up a little at the sight of familiar belongings, but her husband became silent and gloomy. He felt his wife did not appreciate the problems of finding a ready-made dwelling in Adelaide, even one not properly finished. He tactfully suggested a cup of tea before Mrs Popple saw inside the house.

Once they were sitting round the fire on boxes or on the ground, as they had done at Holdfast Bay, and the girls briefly told their adventures, they all began to feel more cheerful.

'You must sleep outside tonight,' said Mr Popple to the girls. 'Ben will bring the tent in the morning and you will sleep in that in future."

Almost as he finished speaking, however, big drops of rain began to fall.

'Get as many things inside as you can,' shouted Mr Popple, 'and we'll have to squeeze the girls' bedding inside somehow or other.'

They all ran to collect the smaller objects while he covered the bigger things with canvas and sacking. The children were so busy carrying boxes, bedding, chairs and bundles into the house that they scarcely noticed that there was no proper floor inside. Mrs Popple saw all at a glance, but said

nothing. She hastily chose corners where they could sleep, and persuaded her husband to pile boxes and furniture in some sort of order so that a narrow passage was left from the front door to the back.

It began to grow dark and the rain continued. Mrs Popple insisted that Tob must be tired after such a long journey, so Clara took off his frock and shoes and put him in the cot. But as soon as she left him he stood up, shook his cot vigorously and howled loudly.

After a while Mr Popple cried, 'Drat that child!' He picked up Tob and sat him on a box. Tob was so surprised, that he stared with his mouth open for a grand yell that never came. Then, gurgling happily, he began to explore. He climbed and crawled, he pulled things over and was nearly trodden on half a dozen times. He was soon covered with dust and either squawking with annoyance or talking happily to himself.

The rain stopped, but the noise and bustle continued. Lucy May found some cooking utensils in an open box and had great fun hurling them in through the front door. Clara told Kate to collect the kitchenware, as well as tubs and basins, and stack them outside the back door. Kate, tired and limping more, did this carefully. But as soon as her back was turned, Lucy May gathered up handfuls of pots, basins and tin plates and threw them inside again. Then Kate would take them outside. It became a grand game.

Soon Annie Popple felt that her head would burst. She looked appealingly at her husband who happened to be on his knees looking for a hammer. He stood up suddenly, knocking over a chair that was balanced on a box and shouted, 'Hold that noise!'

There was a deathly hush.

'Now get off to bed. The lot of you.' He coughed and spluttered in the dust.

Clara hastily collected sacks, rugs and blankets. Kate and Lucy May enjoyed being able to go to bed without washing or undressing.

After a short silence Mrs Popple called anxiously, 'Where's our Tob?'

'I don't know,' answered Clara from behind a trunk. 'He was here a minute ago, getting in everybody's way.'

'Quick, Arthur! Do something.' Mrs Popple became alarmed at once. 'We'll never find him now it's dark.'

'Now Mother, calm yourself. We'd soon hear him if he were in trouble. Look about carefully. He can't be far.'

Clara, holding their one smoking candle, picked her way through the jumble of things while her mother groped about. Mr Popple walked round the house.

Then Clara called, 'Just come and look at this!'

Sticky the goat, half asleep, lay in a corner. Tob, fast asleep, lolled against her, his head half buried in her hairy neck.

'We may as well live in a cow shed and be done with it.' Mrs Popple's voice had a hard edge to it. Then she laughed and went on laughing till tears filled her eyes. The others laughed too.

They all settled down at last. The clouds disappeared and the north wind blew hotter than ever. The ground felt hard and dust filled the air. Occasionally, with a plop, an insect or piece of dried leaf from the roof fell on to a tossing sleeper. The mosquitoes buzzed and stung, and coughing, slapping and sneezing went on for some time.

After a brief stillness, a clanking and clashing woke the whole family. The children called out and shivered with fright.

'We're being attacked,' shrieked Clara, sitting up and clutching a blanket.

Crashes and bangs came again with sounds of somebody fumbling about.

'Help!' gasped Mrs Popple.

Mr Popple sprang up. 'Don't move any one! Don't speak!'

He groped about in the dark for a weapon, and found his wife's "dolly stick". He stumbled to the back door. 'Who's there?' he called.

'It's me Pa.'

'Ben! What do you mean by it? Frightening us to death.'

'Sorry Pa. How was I to know that somebody would leave pots and pans and things strewn about everywhere? A chap at the camp said he'd take our tent on his hand cart if I helped to push it. He said he knew the way, but we've been lost for two hours and more. I'm so tired I'm almost asleep. You can be almost on top of a house and not see it. There

aren't any lights or fires.'

Mrs Popple, wrapped in a rug, came to the door. 'Never mind now,' she said soothingly. 'There's some bread for you covered by an old curtain on the tallest box, and some tea beside it. There isn't an inch to spare inside, so you'd better sleep out. It didn't rain much after all.'

Ben drank the tea but threw away the bread which was black with ants. He found a soft patch of ground, made a hole for his hip, and slept at once.

Chapter 10

EXPLORING

Pale light filtering through cracks in the wall of the hut made jagged haloes round calico and sacking nailed across the windows. Lucy May felt stiff and sore as she sat up and scratched. She nudged Kate. Kate, as usual, muttered something then pulled the rug over her head. Lucy May hissed near her sister's ear, 'It's awful in here. Let's explore.'

As Kate flung back the rug, Lucy May greeted her cheerfully, 'Your face's all blotchy. You look a sight.'

'And *you* look terrible.' Kate crawled out. 'Well? Why don't we go?'

As they crept round the side of the house, Kate whispered, 'Don't look now, but I think Sticky's eating one of Ma's lace curtains. Hurry, before somebody stops us.' She tried to run, but found that her ankle forced her to limp.

They went down the hill, scarcely noticing a jumble of wheel tracks that indicated another street, and the few buildings beside it. Near the river, the grass grew long and soft. Bushes of many kinds clustered by the water, with gums, she-oaks and wattles ranged above. The trees grew more thickly on the northern bank, and tall gums with striped trunks glowed pink in the morning light on the hill beyond.

'That must be North Adelaide,' said Kate. 'Pa promised we could go there for a walk some day.'

'The black people have a camp somewhere,' continued Lucy May, 'but don't let's go there today.'

'Here's a good place to paddle,' called Kate. 'The bushes smell nice too.' They took off their shoes and stockings and tucked up their pantalettes.

The river ran in little trickles between pools, and in some places the steep, overhanging banks were partly hidden by festoons of stringy roots. The two children swung on the strongest ones; Lucy May jumped and scrambled over the boulders, but Kate had to go more carefully.

'We'll have lovely games here,' said Kate happily. 'Houses and hiding and chasing. This is better than Holdfast Bay, isn't it?'

'Yes. It's like Millbrook at home, only not so bare and the water's warmer. There'll be fishes, too, and we'll catch them and cook them.'

They paddled and scrambled down stream. Lucy May, ahead, called eagerly, 'Come and look. It's a horse and he's in the river and there's a man in the river too.'

'Good heavens!' Kate hurried onto the grass. 'I didn't know there were any horses here.'

A rough track, cut through gently sloping banks, led to a wide pool. A man wearing long boots was pouring water from a leather bucket into a barrel which was attached by a harness to the horse standing at the edge of the pool.

'What's that?' asked Kate abruptly.

'Oh Kate! You should say "please".'

'That?' answered the man, 'Just water and a bucket, Missie.' He looked hard at the children, 'New here, aren't you? What do they call you?'

'We only came last night.' Then Kate remembered her manners. 'She's called Lucy May and I'm Kate.'

The man eased his back. 'Sounds as if you come from Yorkshire, like me. Isn't that grand? Would your folk like some water now, one and six the time?'

'Yes please,' said Kate eagerly. 'We've hardly any water left. Does your horse drag that barrel along?'

'He does luv. That barrel goes bumping up hill and down dale all day. It's better work than carting coal in the old

country, though sometimes my back hurts something cruel. Still, I manage.'

'What a lovely horse,' said Lucy May. She wished she could pat him.

'Sailor's a fine horse, luv, and the second one to land in the Province. There were only six sheep, a couple of oxen and one other horse when Sailor and I came. I'm Charlie by the way. Everybody calls me Old Charlie.'

The children told Charlie about the two big horses they used to have on their farm, and about their pigs, sheep and ducks. Charlie spoke about the little mining town where he was brought up.

'My back was crushed in pit when I was a lad,' he explained, 'I came here for the sun and lighter work. Now I must go. Mind those big pools now. They're deep enough to drown you. Somebody should show you how to cross the ford. Gee up Sailor!' He waved cheerfully.

Kate paddled a little and then sat on a large rock. Sounds of children playing came across a patch of reeds in a bend of the river.

'I'm going to look.' Lucy May scampered off.

'I'm staying here.'

Kate sat patiently with her ankle in the cool water as she picked up floating sticks and threw pebbles. A boy with a bucket in either hand came to the ford.

'Hullo Kate! Having trouble with your shoes again?'

'Billy Jamling! I am glad you got here safely. I've hurt my ankle.'

'Sorry about that. Where's Lucy May?'

'She's gone to look at some children over there.'

'They'll be Native children. I saw a boy just now, climbing up a tree like lightning. He had to go thirty or forty feet before the first branches began. Tremendous! He was smoking out an o'possum.'

'But Lucy May shouldn't be there.' Kate was alarmed. 'She's not allowed.'

'Oh she'll be all right. It's very interesting.' Billie picked up his buckets. 'I'll tell her if I see her.'

Lucy May, rather out of breath, returned from another direction. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled. 'Oh Kate!' She began. 'Some little girls were running and jumping and one had a special little stick and was digging for roots and things, and she had a dear little string basket. And two other girls held a piece of string on their fingers and made lovely patterns out of it like the ones I saw at Holdfast Bay, and . . .'

'You're *naughty*. You shouldn't 've been there.'

'And there was a dear little baby lying on a skin rug.'

'Pa told you not to go near them, didn't he?'

'But I wasn't near—well, not *very* near. And do you know what else they were doing?'

'I don't want to hear about it. You're a very naughty girl. I'll have to tell Mama.'

'Please don't Kate. We went off without telling her and now . . .'

'All right then. But you missed seeing Billie.' Lucy May looked disappointed. 'Oh come on then. You make me tired.' Kate's ankle gave a nasty twinge as she stood up.

They saw several huts made of wood and mud, roofed with bark or tent flies. Some of the tents, covered with leafy branches of tea-tree were known as 'bowers'. Further away,

a row of rough huts gave temporary accommodation to settlers in need.

Outside the tents and huts women were bending over pots and kettles.

'I'm hungry,' sighed Lucy May.

They passed a hut made of mud, wood and reeds, much like their own. A notice nailed to a tree said SHOP.

'That must be where the kind lady, Mrs Mac, lives. I wonder if she's there?' Lucy May felt hungrier every minute.

'Don't go now.' Kate's ankle seemed to ache more with every step.

'Wait!' called Lucy May urgently. 'Here's a dear little caterpillar all curled up. Help me to find a smooth piece of bark to put him on.'

'Oh hurry up! Why do we have to wait for that?'

'You haven't waited for me *once* today.' Lucy May pulled a length of curling bark from a tree. 'It's a new kind of caterpillar, and it's very important.'

'Oh all right.' Kate went on slowly.

A big black dog guarding a tent looked familiar. It was the dog that had stolen their leg of mutton at Holdfast Bay. It growled.

'Wait for me,' came the familiar cry.

Kate waited. 'Guess who's just come out of that tent with her hair done up in a floppy cap? Mrs Proud Pettiwell for

sure. You've missed her. No there she is again.'

Kate jerked her sister's elbow in her excitement. The caterpillar fell to the ground and she stood on it.

Lucy May burst into tears. 'My darling caterpillar. He's . . . he's killed.'

'Sorry,' mumbled Kate. Then she waved cheerfully and shouted, 'Good morning Mrs Prou . . . er Mrs Pettiwell. I hope Mr Pettiwell's alive . . . er . . . all right again.'

'Good morning,' said the lady stiffly. She stood and watched until the children passed. The dog growled.

'Bet she's watching to see we don't touch anything of her precious property,' grumbled Kate. 'As if you can even see where people's fences are supposed to go.'

Lucy May dragged behind, sobbing and sniffling.

'Oh blow your nose,' called Kate crossly, 'and let's get back.'

Chapter 11

VISITORS

Mrs Popple poked the fire under the big, black pot, while Clara tried to hold Tob still as she wiped his hands and face with a damp towel. They stared at the two girls straggling back.

'You *must not* wander off without telling us where you are going,' their mother said severely. 'There are all sorts of dangers.'

'Couldn't see any,' muttered Kate, 'except the Pettiwells and their dog that didn't look very kind.'

'That will do, Kate,' said Mrs Popple sharply. 'I will not stand impertinence. You children are not to go anywhere without permission. That is a rule.' Kate and Lucy May hung

their heads. 'And,' continued Mrs Popple, 'you may as well understand from the start, that you will have work to do every morning. You will feed the hens and gather the eggs, Lucy May, and Kate can do some unpacking and sorting. You will both take turns minding Tob, and there will be housework to do as well. "All must work," you know, even children. Do you understand?'

'Yes, Mama.'

'Yes, Ma.'

Annie Popple lifted the lid of the pot, and then looked at the children. 'By the way, if you hadn't been so busy wandering about you could have seen Sticky having her kids. You may be in time to see the last one being born, if you hurry.'

As the children ran off she called, 'Come back after a few minutes, mind.' Then she added to nobody in particular, 'That goat's impossible. In all that turmoil last night, she broke free, and ate all sorts of things, including one of Tob's shoes. How she found it I just don't know. Still, she may behave better now that she has kids to look after.'

Kate and Lucy May watched, fascinated, as the last kid

appeared. It lay bewildered and uncertain, then, with a struggle, stood on thin wobbly legs like the two other kids close by. Lucy May felt certain that Sticky then turned and smiled at her. She crept nearer.

'No! Keep away,' warned Ben, 'in case you frighten them. Sticky needs a rest now. Find some good grass and some water.'

When the children raced back to tell their mother all about it, she listened patiently before saying, 'Yes, it is wonderful, but we must get on with breakfast. Stir the porridge, please Kate. (Soon we'll be able to have milk with it.) And spread the bread with jam, Lucy May. Not too thickly, thank you.'

There was silence for a while until Kate said 'Where's Papa?"

'Mrs Mac's husband is very poorly. Papa has gone to see what he can do. There's no proper infirmary yet, and very few surgeons. Your father must have his breakfast the minute he gets back.'

'Here he comes now,' called Clara.

'Go and call Ben, Lucy May,' said her mother.

Mr Popple strode to the fire and greeted his family absently. H said rather tersely to his wife, 'I don't have time to talk now. I have too much on my mind. There is so much to do here, but I must help the Macs first. They are good friends already.'

'But Arthur, do have your porridge.'

'Oh very well. As long as it's not too hot.' He downed it and was off again.

As soon as her father had gone, Kate burst out with her news. 'Do you know what we saw when we were down by the river? We saw—' she paused dramatically, '—a horse! Not as good as our farm horses, of course, but Old Charlie said . . .'

'Kate, who on earth is Old Charlie?' Clara sounded quite shocked. 'You mustn't go around talking to *anybody*.'

'Old Charlie isn't "anybody". He's a nice old water-carrier and we asked him to bring some water and it's one and six and there are only two horses and about twenty sheep in the whole place and we saw some yesterday. Oh yes, and about six bullocks or something and really and truly . . .'

'That's very interesting, Kate,' said her mother emphatically, 'but we must get on with our work. You can tell us the rest at luncheon. Clara has a job for you and will show you how to do it. Come with me, Lucy May. Be careful not to wake Tob who seems to be having a proper sleep at last.

'Let's begin straight away,' said Clara briskly. 'We are going to make a few dips.'

'Dips? What on earth are they?'

'They're a sort of rough candle.'

'But I can't make candles.' Kate looked sulky.

'You'll soon learn.' Clara's eyes danced and she laughed. 'Mama was only able to bring a little fat from Holdfast Bay. Just enough to start off. We'll need candles in case anything goes wrong. Like last night for instance.'

'But what do I have to do?' Kate looked even more sullen.

'First of all, you'll have to collect every scrap of fat, including pieces left on people's plates. Then you must put them in the fat tin to be rendered down. You must never throw away the smallest piece. Is that clear?'

'Suppose so,' muttered Kate. 'What does "rendered down" mean?' She was thinking: Wish I was the Governor's daughter. I'd live in a pretty cottage with lots of servants. I'd never waste a lovely day bothering about nasty pieces of fat.

'Now listen to what I'm saying.' Clara spoke sharply. 'Wake up and listen. I don't want to have to say it all over again. Get that bowl of fat I strained a while ago—over there on the box nearest to the fire.'

Kate carried the fat to the table. It had a sickly smell.

'Now find the ball of twisted wool in my work-basket, and cut off a piece this long.' Clara held out her hands to show the length.

'Why?'

'Just wait and see. Don't be impatient.'

'I'm not impatient. I just want to know what it's for.'

'Now, hold the end of the wool and don't let go while I do this.' Clara dipped her part of the wool into the fat, then stretched it out again. 'Now dip your half.' Kate tried. 'Oh don't get the fat all over your hands!'

'It's only the first time I've done it!'

'Now, hang up the wool on that string in the shade. Then we'll dip another piece of wool.'

'Silly-looking thin candles, and they're too long.' Kate wiped her greasy hands on her frock.

'As soon as the fat sets,' explained Clara calmly, 'you dip again. The long candle gets a little fatter each time. Then when the candles are thick enough, you cut and trim them. You store the dips in a tin. See?'

'How long will it take?' asked Kate gloomily.

'I expect it will take *you* days, even weeks.' Clara laughed gaily.

Kate looked at the greasy skin over her hands and at the fatty blobs on her dress. She realized that as long as nights were dark, a dreadful task would always await her.

'Let's do another,' suggested Clara. But a cry of 'Water-ho' interrupted her.

'Old Charlie,' cried Kate and dashed off.

Charlie touched his cap as he saw Mrs Popple and Clara, and welcomed them to Adelaide.

Mrs Popple said she was sure they would like it once they had settled down. She bought some water but explained that her husband and son would do most of the water-carrying themselves. Charlie said that he quite understood, and went down the hill whistling his favourite tune.

Ben did not have a successful morning. He had tried to rig up a hammock for himself, like the one he'd slept in on the ship, but found that the saplings he had collected were not strong enough to hold it. He looked at the earth floor in the hut and decided that he couldn't flatten the raised parts, as digging would make clouds of dust, and couldn't fill in the hollows with mud, as there was no spare water for mixing the dry clay. He went outside and announced that he could do with some tea.

Kate, much to everybody's surprise, volunteered to make it. As they munched some dry bread and drank their tea Ben asked his mother's advice.

'I suggest you take the sledge, get some more water, and try to find some reeds that we can use for mattresses. And then . . . Oh!'

An Aboriginal woman stood near the outer side of the fire. She held out her hand and said something they could not understand. The older members of the family felt alarmed, but Kate and Lucy May stared curiously.

Ben felt that he should look after them all, so he sprang to his feet and shouted, 'Go away!' The woman, looked bewildered and took a couple of steps towards them. Ben clenched his fists. 'Be off, can't you.'

'No. Wait a minute.' Mrs Popple's voice trembled a little as she stood beside Ben. 'She's probably hungry.' Looking at the woman she said slowly and clearly, 'What do you want?'

'Bullocky. Backy.'

Mrs Popple shook her head. 'No bullocky. No backy. But,' she glanced at Clara. 'Tea. Sweet tea. Pour some, Clara, and hand it to me.'

'See it's not too hot,' suggested Kate.

'I'll give it to her,' volunteered Ben.

'No,' answered his mother, 'It'll be better if I do it. There's a crust of bread left. Fetch it someone. Thank you.'

Annie Popple walked slowly towards the woman who retreated a little.

She sipped the tea, put the pannikin on the ground with the crust beside it, then walked back and sat down.

'Now. Go on as before, but don't move suddenly.' She looked fondly at her family.

They talked nervously.

'Our Ma's real good isn't she?' whispered Kate to Lucy May.

'Yes. But I wish I could feel that lovely o'possum rug that lady's wearing.'

The woman picked up the pannikin warily and began to drink.

'Tea,' said Mrs Popple.

'Tea. Good,' said Kate.

'Tea. Good,' repeated the woman.

'Remember,' Annie Popple spoke softly to the family, 'always *give* something to these visitors. We have many things they have never seen before.'

The woman began to eat the bread. She listened, then disappeared noiselessly.

Just then, Billie appeared. He stared at the strange look on their faces. 'What's the matter with you all?'

They all began to talk at once. Ben explained what had happened, and the children asked Billie lots of questions: When did the Jamlings arrive? Where did they live? Did they have a mud hut too? Then Lucy May pulled Billie's sleeve and shouted, 'Sticky's had three kids. Isn't it wonderful? Come and look.'

She raced off, followed by Billie and Kate.

'Have some tea, Mama. You look as if you need it.'

Mrs Popple drank thankfully, then turned to Ben. 'How about fetching the water and reeds now? The children can help.'

'Yes,' he agreed eagerly. 'They can take turns riding on the seldge to the river, and help to pull it back. Billie too, of course, if he wants to come.'

Chapter 12

An Old Friend Turns Up

'Did you hear that?'

'Yes.' Kate nodded. 'Ma told Pa that he was making a good job of the cottage. But I don't like it do you?'

'No. We shan't be able to shake hands through the walls now. Pa's put so much mud on the outside.'

'And he stopped us playing hide-and-seek in the passage, too.'

'Yes. It's not much fun now.'

During the past few weeks Mr Popple and Ben had made a narrow passage from the front door to the back one by nailing old pieces of hessian, tarpaulin, rugs and sheets to frameworks of saplings. The children used to wriggle underneath these walls and poke holes in them, so Mr Popple forbade games indoors. Kate, who disobeyed, was rapped on the knuckles and deprived of jam for a week.

Strips of oilcloth, Indian matting and carpet covered most of the floor, and Clara and her mother sewed together long strips of calico which were nailed on to sapling rafters to make a ceiling.

'The place looks less like a barn now,' said Annie Popple as she finished making scones. 'But I do wish Mr Parker would come with the rest of our furniture. We've been here

nearly three weeks now.'

'You manage very well though, Mother.' Arthur Popple encouraged his wife. 'Now, let me lift the lid of the oven, as the scones look ready to go in.'

'But Aunt Florrie's sofa gets more battered every day. If you'd told me at home that we'd have to live in a tent and a hut without a fire-place, I'd have said you were daft.'

'Proper daft, my love.' Mr Popple actually laughed. 'Now, I'll try to find Colonel Light and find out what's happening to the country surveys.' He cut some wood, filled the kettle, found his hat and set off down the street.

Creaking wheels, a cracking whip, and shouting and swearing announced a bullock wagon.

'Quick!' shouted Kate, 'It's coming down our hill. Hurry up, Lucy May, or you'll miss it.'

The two children rushed up the hill, and Mrs Popple, dusting her hands, walked to the front of the house. The stout driver wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a green waistcoat, faded blue coat and tight, white trousers waved to them as he stopped the bullocks.

'Well, Mrs. Well, young ones,' he said hoarsely, swishing the flies. 'Here I am with your furniture. Not as fresh as it was I fear. A bit parched like, but in fair condition Mam. In fair condition.' He beamed at them and mopped his face. The bullocks slobbered.

'Oh Mr Parker. We *are* glad to see you.' Mrs Popple dusted her hands again.

'Nice place you have here, Mam. Very nice.' Mr Parker had a fit of sneezing and his voice cracked and trailed away. 'Pardon me, Mam, but this work is hot and dusty like. Dif-

ferent from the foggy, foggy dew of old England, isn't it?' He sneezed again. 'Real parched I am from shouting at these blast . . . er, these . . . er, animals.'

Mr Parker climbed down awkwardly and leaned against one of the huge wheels of the wagon. He blew out of the corner of his mouth, fumbled with the gold chain stretched across his ample stomach and found his watch. He opened the lid. 'Three hours and thirty-two minutes precisely. Not bad for such a journey. Not bad at all.' He snapped the lid shut.

Mrs Popple thanked him. 'I'm just about to mash the tea. Will you take a cup?'

'Tea!' exclaimed Mr Parker. 'That's just what the doctor ordered.'

'Is that your bullock wagon?' asked Kate suddenly.

'Mind your manners, Kate,' said Mrs Popple frowning.

'In a manner of speaking, yes. Man who owned it—fellow who lived in the reed hut behind us—remember? Poor fellow dropped dead on the road the other day—heat stroke or something. Very sad. Widow said I could use this outfit till she's ready to sell.'

'I do hope you get it,' Kate said fervently. She imagined herself driving all over the countryside with Mr Parker.

'My word, there's money in this business, Mam. Make no mistake.' He warded off another sneeze. 'There's so few of these beastly . . . beg pardon Mam, er . . . of these creatures in the Province you know. There's any amount of carting work. Any amount.'

Mrs Popple said she was glad to hear it, and added that it must be a great comfort to Mrs Parker to have a husband who was doing so well.

Mr Parker nodded and asked solemnly, 'Know how much the fellow made who put twenty tons of water on the last ship that sailed? One hundred pounds no less. There's a fortune in this business. Make no mistake.'

'I'm sure there are great opportunities here,' agreed Annie Popple. 'But do have some tea. The scones are still hot.'

'I knew it!' cried Mr Parker, slapping his stomach, 'I smelt them up at West Terrace.'

Kate grinned and Lucy May was most impressed. Their guest stood and stretched.

'Joints creak a bit, like the wagon.'

'Oh please!' cried Kate, unable to be silent any longer. 'Can I have a ride on your wagon?'

'Me too,' added Lucy May.

Mr Parker began to say, 'Of course you may,' when Mrs Popple interrupted, 'Not now Kate. Mr Parker is hot and thirsty. Some other time perhaps. Don't go too near the bullocks while we're away.'

Mr Parker gave a slight wink to the disappointed children as he followed their mother. Clara brought him their strongest chair. He sat down heavily, stirred large quantities of sugar into his tea and drank with loud sucking noises. His drooping moustache kept dipping into the mug, so he had to stop several times to wipe it. The new scones began to disappear like magic, for he took only two bites to each.

During his vigorous eating and drinking, Mr Parker enquired after the rest of the family and passed on quite a lot of news. 'New chap from Devon way . . .' he'd begin, or: 'Carting a load for a big Scotsman the other day I actually saw . . .' or: 'Fine woman off the last ship had so much luggage . . .' He told story after story, drained his mug twice and asked for more.

Clara said, 'How about a basin full? Papa always has a basin after working. He says anything smaller is a waste of time.'

Mr Parker was delighted, and asked after the family's food supply. 'We're beginning to want more of everything, Mam. Houses, shops, stores even hotels—begging your pardon. What about opening a little shop yourself? A store that sold a little bit of everything would be a real pot of gold before long. A real pot of gold. Almost as good as a bullock wagon.' Mr Parker thought this a great joke and laughed so much he nearly choked.

Mrs Popple was surprised, almost shocked by the suggestion. 'I don't think I could keep a *shop*,' she faltered. 'I hope to sell more cheese, butter and eggs, soon. We will manage very well when we get our land in the country.'

'No offence, Mam. No offence.' Mr Parker finished his basin of tea. 'Always happy to help old friends. That's me. But Miss Clara now: there are excellent opportunites for well-bred and industrious young ladies to go into service. If I find a refined gentlewoman who needs some help, I'll let

you know.'

Mrs Popple and Clara seemed upset by this idea also. 'If the surveying is done soon, we shall move into the country,' explained Mrs Popple again. 'We shall all be busy on our farm.'

The children had grown tired of looking at the bullocks and climbing on and off the wagon, so joined the tea-drinkers.

Lucy May slid between Mr Parker and the scones and tried to catch her mother's eye. 'Come here,' said their guest, 'and sit on my knee. Has old what's-her-name, your nanny goat, done the right thing yet?'

'O yes! She's had three kids,' explained Lucy May proudly, 'a boy kid and two lady kids. Papa sold two and got four pounds for them, and Mama's keeping the other for butter. She's called Pansy.'

They all laughed and Lucy May looked puzzled.

Then Mr Parker brushed the crumbs from his waistcoat, wiped his moustache and set about unloading the furniture from the wagon. When he had finished he said, 'Will you permit me to take these dear children to the ford while I water the bullocks? They'll be quite safe with me.'

'Well, yes.' Mrs Popple agreed reluctantly. 'But they must sit down properly on the wagon, and come straight back.'

Mr Parker beamed at them all. He took off his battered hat and made as sweeping a bow as a stout, hot man could make. Then he said earnestly, 'Thank you, my dear lady, for the most excellent tea and for the refreshing company.'

Mrs Popple smiled and asked him to call again and to bring Mrs Parker. She waved to the excited children as the wagon went across the fields towards the river. The bullocks hurried. They knew they were at the end of their journey.

The children had a short but wonderful ride to the ford where they had first met Old Charlie, and climbed down reluctantly. Lucy May thanked Mr Parker in her best style, and Kate said, 'Please, couldn't you call on us every week?'

'I'll see what I can do, my dear.' Mr Parker smiled and winked.

'Anyway,' Kate declared, 'I'm going to drive a bullock wagon down Rundle Street myself one day.'

'Well, you never know,' said Mr Parker.

Chapter 13

Secrets

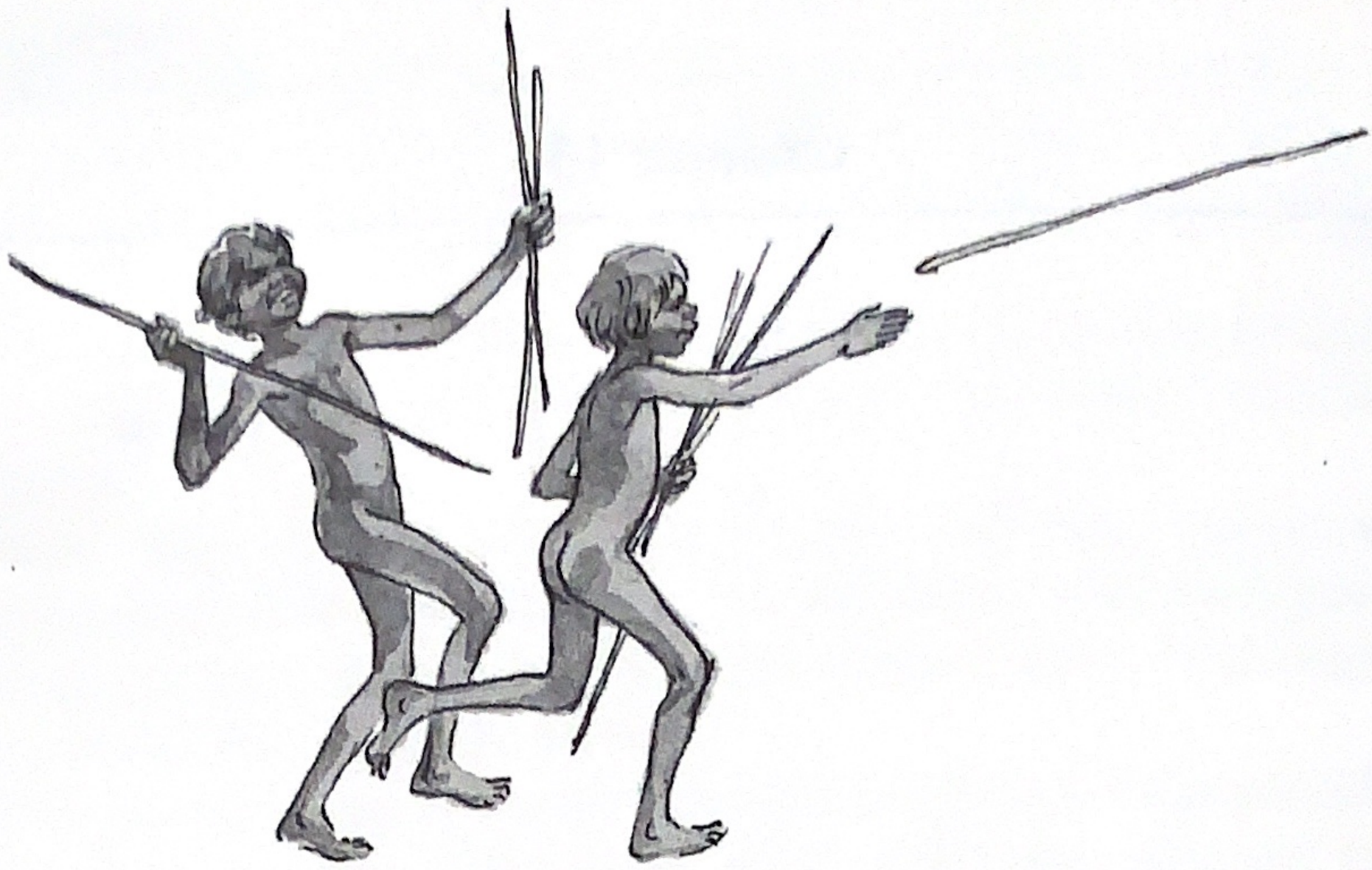
By the end of the summer, the Popple family had settled down to a life of hard work with occasional fun. Sticky and Pansy grew plump and contented, and Lucy May carefully fed her rabbit Twitch and played with him whenever she could. Billie Jamling sometimes joined her. He often wished that his father had not given the rabbit away.

On most afternoons, the children were free to play in the open bushland near their home, sometimes with other children, sometimes by themselves.

One hot day, Kate began to play a rather rough game with Billie and his friends, so Lucy May wandered about near the river. She stopped, listened and then crept forward carefully. A group of Aboriginal children playing near the reeds seemed to be the same ones she had watched on her first morning in Adelaide. The younger children shouted and laughed as they ran, jumped and tumbled about, while two boys were throwing little spears at a target.

Lucy May was about to ask if she could join in the games when a little girl ran to a small tree, climbed it dextrously, swung hand over hand along a thin branch, curled up and then hung by her legs.

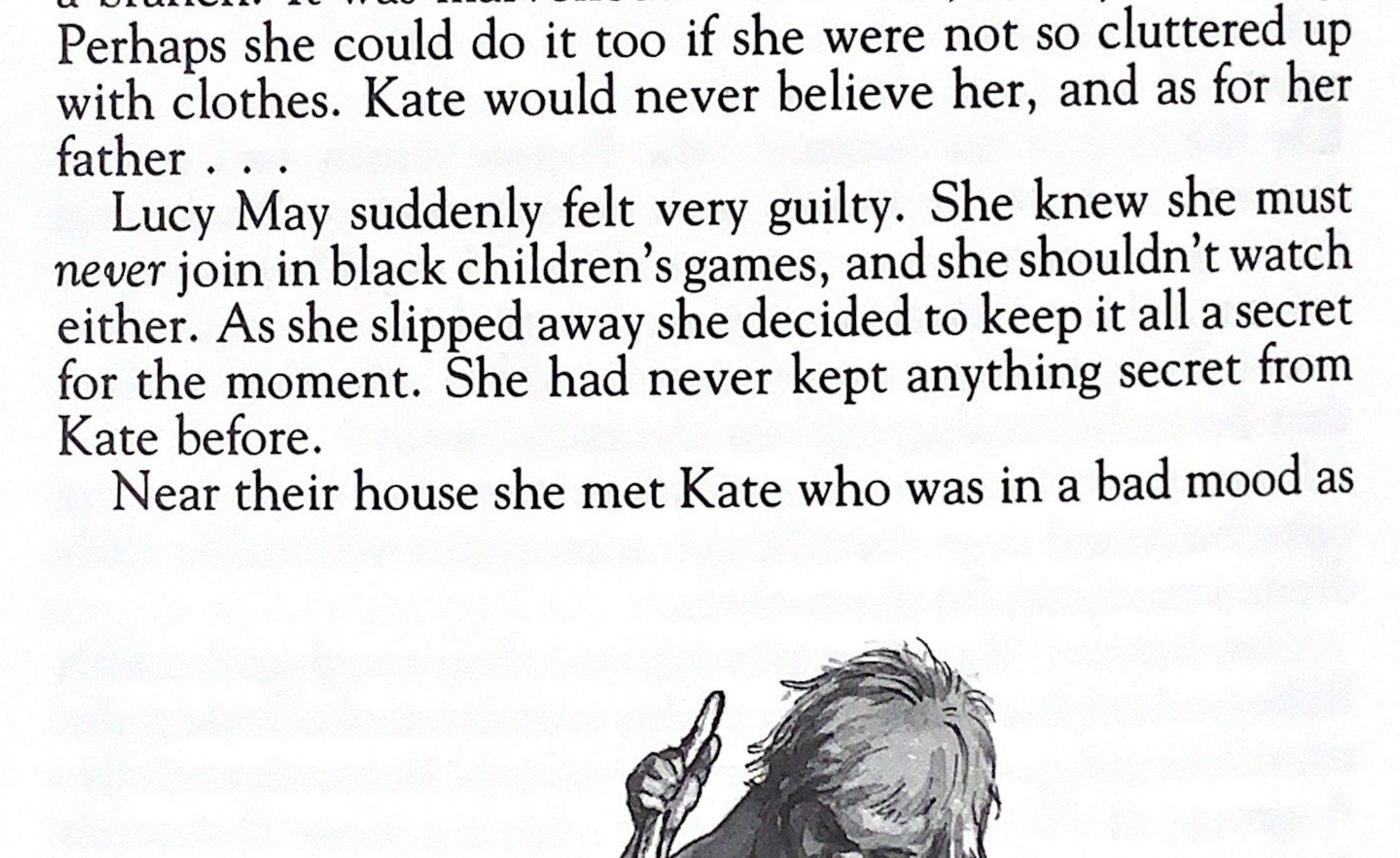
Lucy May stood amazed. She had no idea that girls could



climb trees like that, or that they could hang and swing from a branch. It was marvellous. She stared, hardly breathing. Perhaps she could do it too if she were not so cluttered up with clothes. Kate would never believe her, and as for her father . . .

Lucy May suddenly felt very guilty. She knew she must *never* join in black children's games, and she shouldn't watch either. As she slipped away she decided to keep it all a secret for the moment. She had never kept anything secret from Kate before.

Near their house she met Kate who was in a bad mood as



the boys had not wanted her in their game. The children began to quarrel.

Inside, Mr Popple flung a boot on to the floor. 'That's settled it,' he exclaimed. He hurled down the other boot. 'Another of my ideas gone sour. I wanted to buy a pig, fatten it and sell it. But now . . .' He would have thrown another boot if he'd had one. 'One of the horrible animals dug up my potato patch last night, and the other night it killed two chickens. It really is over the fence.'

Annie Popple could not help smiling, because she knew that such calamities happened because there *were* no fences. She hoped her husband had not seen her smile.

'Sticky's been concentrating mainly on grass lately, thank heaven,' continued Mr Popple, 'But yesterday, I saw Pansy having a nibble at the washing. Like mother like kid I suppose. Lucy May wastes a lot of time with that rabbit with the ridiculous name, by the way.'

'But the vegetables that survived have been wonderful,' Mrs Popple observed soothingly. 'They are twice as big as those grown in England, and grow twice as fast.'

'Yes, of course. But fences are not our only problem Annie. I think things are far more serious than that.'

'What do you mean Arthur?'

'I'm becoming more and more worried about the management of this Province. New settlers keep pouring in, so land is getting short and is being sold at higher and higher prices. Food is scarce and we have to rely on supplies from New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.'

'But Arthur, surely there are miles and miles of uncultivated land near here.'

'Yes, I know. But it must be properly surveyed first, and then bought and sold properly. We must not start grasping it for ourselves. I'll go and have another talk to one of Colonel Light's men. The surveying is not going at all well.' Mr Popple put on his boots again.

As he pulled open the door, he saw Kate grab a handful of Lucy May's curls and receive a shove and a kick in return.

'Stop that disgraceful behaviour!' he shouted. 'Why aren't you brick-making? I thought you wanted to help to improve the cottage. We'll never get those extra rooms built if we have to rely on *you*.'

'We . . . we do brick-making in the mornings.'

'Plenty of other jobs, aren't there? What do you suggest Annie?'

'I think they could help with some candle-making.'

'Candle-making it is then.'

'Lucy May opened her mouth to say that it was not one of *her* jobs, but a glance at her father made her decide it would be wise to remain silent. She followed Kate round the house.

Kate clenched her teeth, went red in the face and growled as loudly as she dared, 'Nasty, horrid dips. I *hate* them. And I hate you too.' She shook her sister. 'It's all your fault.'

Lucy May, thoroughly frightened, stammered, 'I . . . I . . . haven't done anything.'

'Oh yes you have, Miss Goody-goody. Who's afraid of the dark, I'd like to know? Who has to have a stupid, smoky dip by the bed every night? The silly things flop over in the tiniest draught, so Clara sits with us and we have to fold our clothes and wipe our faces and say our prayers and it's all your fault you big cry-baby.'

Tears were running down Lucy May's cheeks. 'I . . . I . . . can't help it. I . . . I . . .'

'Shut up, can't you, or Clara will hear us. She might'nt notice us if we're quiet.'

Kate stalked to the back of the house and flopped down beside a cupboard, while Lucy May squeezed herself between two boxes that held kitchen utensils. She sobbed and snivelled. Clara, sitting at a table under an umbrella, was keeping an eye on Pansy and the chickens while she wrote to her Aunt Mary. She ignored the children.

'Adelaide is a most beautiful place,' she read to herself, 'although hot winds blow clouds of dust into the house all day, and the sky is a glaring blue. The country all round is like a gentleman's park with scattered shrubs and trees of many kinds. Bright-coloured birds fly past all day. There are no fences or hedges yet and trees still grow in the streets.

'The people are friendly and happy and few have coughs or colds. I do wish dear Uncle could come here, for I am sure his cough would be cured. There are no beggars in the streets, as at home, and everybody is most honest. Some friends of ours were exploring when some strangers came to

their cottage. The visitors had a meal and a rest, as it is the custom here to help yourself and leave something in exchange. They did not touch the money that was in a box by the door.

'There are no grand carriages here, like the squire's at home. You would smile to see fine ladies sitting on mattresses on boxes in rough carts. Food is very dear and we don't get fresh vegetables very often.'

'How much is bread, Mama?' called Clara as her mother came to the door. But she began to day dream about John, as she often did, so did not hear the answer.

'It's a dreadful price,' her mother was saying. 'People should bake their own.'

'Sometimes we have kangaroo steak, and once we had an o'possum which tasted rather like rabbit,' continued Clara. 'But mostly we have salt meat and are very tired of it. Some friends gave Lucy May a rabbit because she saved its life from heat stroke on the journey to Adelaide. Papa says we'll have to eat it if we get really hungry. This upsets Lucy May.'

'Do you want Aunt Mary to send anything special in her next parcel, Mama?' called Clara again.

Mrs Popple thought again as she filled the kettle. 'Yes.

Ask if she will send a cask of apples.' Then she shook her long skirts as she walked towards Clara. 'Oh, I forgot! It's not "the back end" over there, it's spring of course. The seasons are all topsy-turvy. But ask if she can spare a side of bacon and some dry biscuits in a well-sealed tin. Oh, and thank her for the honey, but don't tell her that the jar broke and the girls' dresses were spoiled.' Mrs Popple turned and saw the crouching children. 'I thought you were sent round here to work. Go inside at once.'

'The children get naughtier every day,' complained Mrs Popple, and Kate's temper is shocking.'

'Yes. I heard Kate flying at Lucy May just now. Perhaps they should have some work to do in the afternoons.'

'We must find time to give them more lessons. Once or twice a week is not enough.'

To be sent inside on a Friday afternoon was a severe punishment. Saturday afternoons had to be spent there. Under Clara's supervision, the girls had to darn and mend and then learn Bible verses which were recited to their father at night. They had to endure a weekly "wash down" as well. If the children recited their verses correctly, Mr Popple would take them for a Sunday walk when they wore their best clothes, bonnets and mittens.

Long prayers followed Sunday breakfasts, and then all the family attended morning service and usually Sunday school as well. As there was a shortage of buildings, services were usually held in gentlemen's houses or marquees. The different religious groups made a genuine effort to share buildings, services and prayer meetings. A service was sometimes cancelled so all could attend a special one.

The men in their substantial clothes and the women in spreading dresses sat solemnly, though precariously, on boxes and forms. They joined in the hymns, prayers and Bible-readings as they had done in their homeland. Earnest local preachers delivered long, and usually tedious sermons, while the children suffered agonies trying to keep still and quiet. It was often stuffy and hot inside the marquees, and ladies were inclined to attacks of the vapours.

Mr Popple insisted on proper conduct for the whole day. The children must not make a noise, rush about or get their clothes dirty.

'The only good thing about Sundays,' grumbled Kate, 'is that we are allowed to use good, tallow candles, and sometimes we have cake for tea. Ben's the lucky one. He's allowed to go out by himself.' Sunday afternoon was Ben's only free time in the whole week.

One Sunday afternoon, Mr Popple suggested a walk in the Park Lands as usual. Lucy May and Kate always hoped that he would take them to North Adelaide for a change. But whenever they ventured to suggest this he would say, 'Why go to North Adelaide? It's just the same as here.'

'Park Lands!' exclaimed Kate when she thought she was out of earshot, 'I'm sick of the things.'

Lucy May laughed. 'You sound just like the shepherd we met when we walked from Holdfast Bay and you sprained your ankle.'

Mrs Popple's ears were working well, as usual. 'Kate,' she said quietly, 'As you don't like walking in the Park Lands, Clara and I will go instead. It will be a pleasant change for us. Please keep your eye on Tob. He's all right at the moment.'

Kate pouted, muttered out of the corner of her mouth and went inside. Tob was playing happily near the fire.

She pulled open her drawer in the chest of drawers and peered at the muddle inside. She threw the contents on to a chair and stamped her foot as some of the clothes fell to the floor. Then she stumped about the house, looking around scornfully.

Fancy leaving a big stone house for an old hut! They all lived on top of each other. She and Lucy May were constantly told to tidy things, put them away, sort things and dust. Sometimes, they dusted three times a day.

She found a newspaper, glanced at it and threw it down again. She was not supposed to read newspapers on Sundays. She remembered Tob, so went to the door again. He was playing with a pile or stones. She took the paper again, and tried to read a couple of advertisements. She was a slow reader, so soon gave up. She folded a couple of petticoats, muttering again, then walked to the door. But her surly expression quickly widened to a smile.

The Aboriginal woman who had asked for food a few

weeks earlier was looking at Tob. She held a bunch of succulent green leaves. Tob chuckled as he held out a stone to her. The woman offered her green posy. Tob was not interested in it, but he gurgled and held his stone higher. The woman imitated his gesture. Tob said something in his own peculiar language and the woman smiled. There was a moment of uncertainty.

Kate whispered, 'Oh take it Tob. Do take it.'

The woman turned, walked towards Kate, and offered the posy to her. Kate stepped outside to receive the gift.

'Watercress!' she exclaimed, 'Real watercress! We haven't had watercress since we . . . since . . .' Her voice trailed to a sob.

When Kate looked up, the woman stood hesitating.

'Wait. Just a minute.' Kate went to the crock beneath the table and cut a thick slice of bread. The woman took it gratefully, smiled and walked away, carrying it carefully.

Mrs Popple, coming round the corner of the house, saw Kate with a handful of wild watercress and a far-away look in her eyes.

'How did you get it Kate?'

'That black woman gave it to me, Mama. I think she likes us—especially Tob.'

'I think she must,' said her mother quietly, 'Perhaps she will come again.'

Kate stiffened. 'But Papa! He told us not to have anything to do with the dark people. Is he here?'

'No. It's all right. We may be able to help him to change his mind. It's time you realized that his bark's often worse than his bite.' Annie Popple looked rather confused for a moment, then added, 'Perhaps I shouldn't say that Kate. But your father feels responsible for all of us, and he's very worried because things are not working out as he expected. Sometimes he's over-strict.'

'Yes Mama. I think I understand.'

'But are you quite sure it was the same woman? Did you give her anything?'

'Yes. I'm quite sure Mama. She wasn't wearing that lovely o'possum rug she had before, but a sailor's old shirt. I'm sure though.'

'Good. Now go and soak the watercress. It will be a grand

surprise for our tea. I'll explain to Papa. Just try to sit still and say nothing for once. We won't mention it to Lucy May for the present.'

Mrs Popple found a basin and handed it to Kate. Kate hugged her mother. She felt very important and grown up.

Chapter 14

'Children are so useful'

With the first showers of early autumn, the children's work increased. Their father wanted to add two rooms of mud bricks to the back of the house before the winter rains

set in. Kate and Lucy May helped to make the bricks, and were constantly urged to work harder.

Behind the house, Mr Popple had dug several small areas where he sowed vegetable seeds—his seed-beds. The birds did not take any interest in these, but the hens did. Kate or Lucy May was expected to chase the hens away and do her work—outdoor or indoor—at the same time.

Brick-making in the mornings usually began seriously, but soon turned to play. The children enjoyed mixing the soft clay with straw, pounding it with their fists and pressing it into moulds with a clumsy mallet made by their father. They greatly enjoyed slipping, sliding and falling over. They threw mud balls at each other when nobody was looking, made mud statues, and soon looked like large clumsy puppets.

Mrs Popple was so shocked when she first saw them at their work that she almost sat down in the clay herself. After scolding the children she gave them "working clothes" that were only washed when they became too stiff to wear. Clara took the two girls to the river each day and scrubbed their hands, faces and feet, while Ben became the supervisor of brick-making. So the whole family shared in the building work.

Early one morning, Ben was hollowing out a cellar and helping a man who was digging a well. He watched his sisters scornfully. 'Stop larking, can't you. Work properly while the clay's wet.'

'It's all very well for you, Ben,' grumbled Kate. 'You're a big strong boy, and boys like digging and working.'

'Do you think I *like* doing this?' Ben threw a shovelful of clay in Kate's direction.

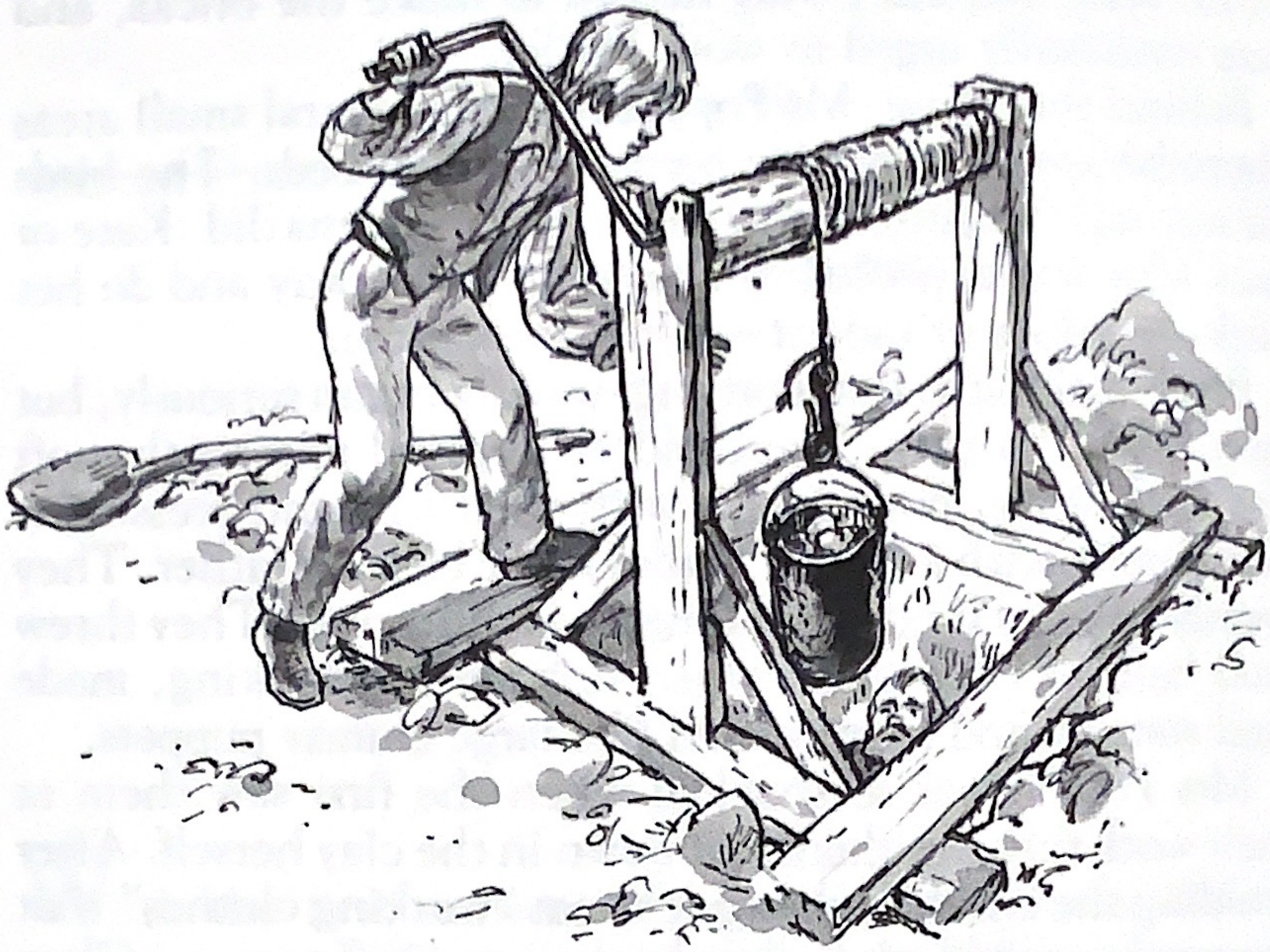
'Don't you?' Kate looked surprised. 'Oh, I remember. You said you wanted to be . . .'

'Stop that!' Ben clenched his teeth and his face turned red. Kate felt guilty.

A muffled cry came from the well. 'All right,' called Ben. He turned the handle of the windlass and wound up a bucketful of earth and stones. 'How's your luck?'

'Nothing doing,' came a voice from below. 'Getting stonier, that's all.'

Ben returned to his cellar-digging. 'Oh get on with it, you girls,' he said irritably. His parents kept him so busy that he



had walked round Adelaide only three or four times in as many weeks. They all went to bed soon after dark, and only the girls were free in the afternoons, so Ben had no time to himself. When they moved to the country, he supposed, they would have to begin everything all over again.

When he looked up, Kate was pretending to be an Egyptian slave driver, flourishing a whip, while Lucy May was refusing to make bricks without straw.

'Lucy May,' shouted Ben, 'if you're not making bricks you could at least watch the hens. They're in the carrot patch again. It's your turn to keep them away.'

Lucy May, who always felt upset if Ben spoke to her severely, ran after the hens. It was almost impossible to watch all the time, and she had chased them away half a dozen times that morning. She kept a little pile of mud balls to throw at them, but she was not a very good shot. She returned from the chase, flushed and puffed, sat down beside her ammunition and announced, 'Shan't do any more today. It's not fair.'

Kate had been about to say something similar, but as Lucy May had said it first, she folded her arms and scolded like

her mother: 'You've hardly done anything yet, young lady, I'm very disappointed in you.'

Lucy May picked up one of her cannon balls and took careful aim, but Ben shouted, 'Stop it you two! And watch out! There's Tob near the well again. Why can't you be a bit responsible?'

Kate ran to Tob, shouting: 'He's Clara's job, not mine.'

'Oh no you don't!' Ben bristled with annoyance. 'You know perfectly well that Clara's helping Ma with the washing at the river.'

'I . . . er . . . forgot,' faltered Kate. She picked up Tob, rather roughly. He kicked her legs. 'Aw! You little . . .' She slapped him and he yelled and kicked again.

'Get out, the lot of you!' shouted Ben, feeling he would like to scream and kick too. 'Go to the river and wash the muck off . . . or do something.'

Kate wedged Tob firmly under her arm and stumbled off. She and Lucy May were only too glad to escape.

Ben tried to lever out a large stone with his shovel. The handle broke as the labourer called for help. Ben swore under his breath—a feeble outburst, as he did not know many swear words. He helped the well-digger, then sat and chewed a straw.

He went over his problems again. If only his father had waited for a couple of years before coming to the Province. The worst of the pioneering could then have been done by others. There was no time to read, no books even, and nobody to help him to learn anything. Just work, work, work. He scornfully inspected his sisters' unfinished work. The moulds were not properly filled so he would have to pack in more clay and ram it down again. Anyway, brick-making was better than digging the cellar. He began his second task, leaving the broken shovel where he had tossed it. Then he walked to the well.

'Any luck yet?'

'About twenty feet down, and as dry as a bone.'

'Everything's wrong today,' muttered Ben. Then he smelt a pleasant smell. 'Mama's bread! I promised I'd look after it.'

He strode to the fire, raked the ashes off the top of the oven, and lifted the lid with the curved iron poker. As he set the two brown, crisp loaves to cool, he realized that he

was hungry and guessed the others would feel the same. He made up the fire and filled the kettle from the cask by the back door. He then poked the clothes that were boiling in a big shallow pan at the edge of the fire.

Then he noticed that while he had been dreaming the hens had been busy in the seed-beds again. He rushed at them and they scattered, clucking their annoyance. As he turned round, Sticky, who was tethered by a chain to a stake, suddenly broke loose. She was an expert at a sudden twist and jerk which neatly pulled the stake out of the ground. She would quickly seize any article of food, clothing, rag or paper that happened to be about, and almost grin as she chewed it.

'Drat all animals, and drat all children.' Ben hammered in the stake for the third time that morning.

'Oh Ben! You didn't aught to say things like that.' Lucy May trotted round the corner of the house. Before Ben could correct her, she added, 'Ma says will you go and carry the clothes basket as it's too heavy for her and Clara.'

'Very well. But you must set the table in about ten minutes, and then I'll mash the tea.'

'I don't know how to count ten minutes.'

'It's time you did. You just find out.'

As soon as Ben had gone, Lucy May ran to a place where she could see people coming from all directions, and began her "special practice".

She had managed to slip away from Kate on several afternoons, and had watched the Aboriginal children again down by the river. Once Kate found her without shoes and stockings, and had lectured her severely. When Lucy May explained that she was practising a good trick, Kate insisted on seeing it.

After many mistakes and much effort, Lucy May managed to pick up a stick with her toes, flick it into the air, and *almost* catch it in her mouth. 'That's not much,' Kate had said, but Lucy May strongly suspected that Kate was doing a little practising herself.

Ben found his mother, Clara, and Kate, near the ford. Clean clothes, sheets and towels were spread on bushes and on the grass as at Holdfast Bay. Several women were kneel-

ing by their wash tubs, washing busily. They gossiped and laughed as they shared their experiences. Mrs Popple had learnt that other families had troubles similar to her own. Mrs Jamling had had two flannel shirts and her second best petticoat stolen from the line, and a wild dog had taken six of her neighbour's chickens. Mrs Popple told the women how Sticky had eaten a pair of Kate's muddy stockings and a doughy cake that Clara had made and nobody would eat. They all had a good laugh.

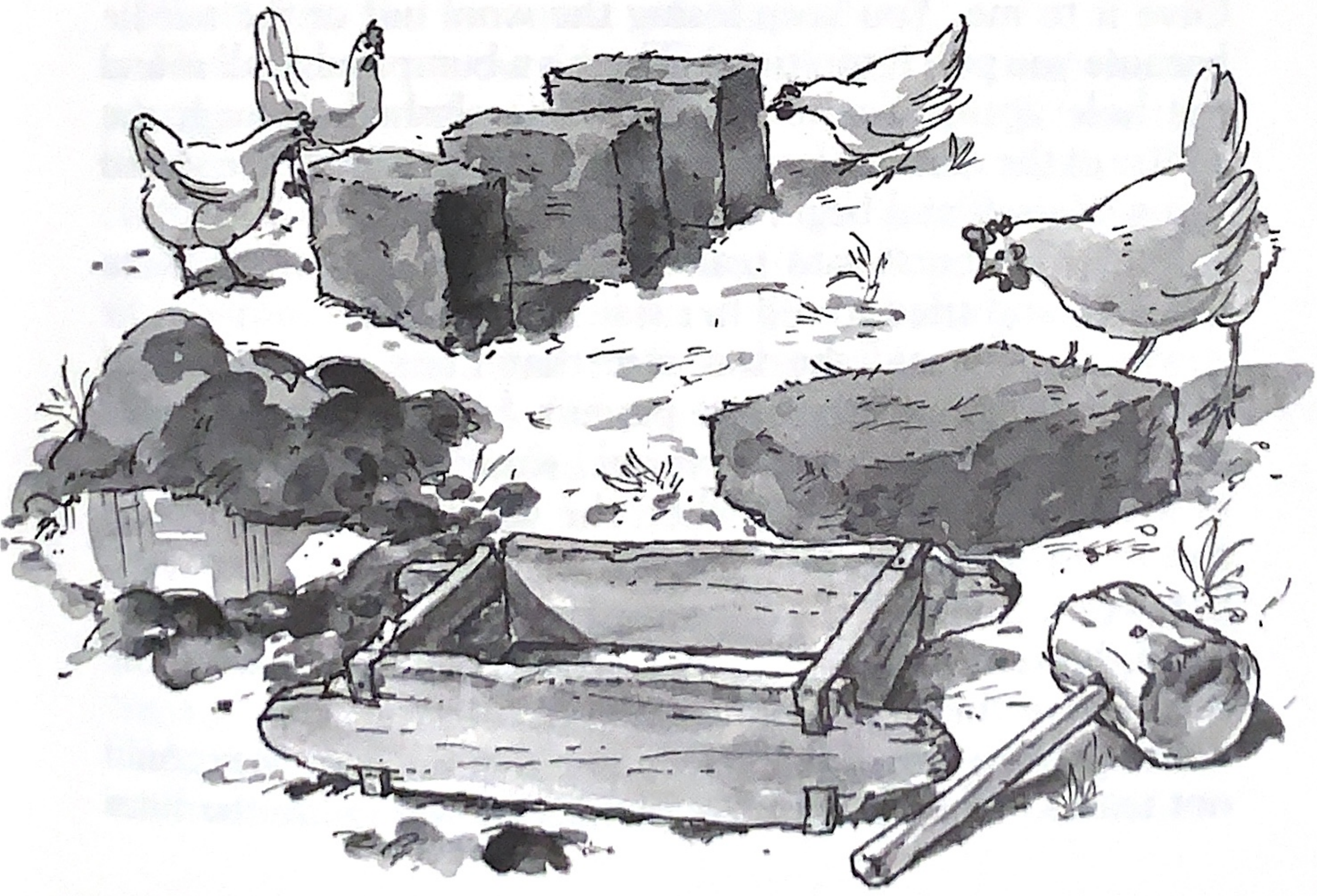
Mrs Popple and Clara had the half-dry washing neatly folded in a basket. Clara had met a girl her own age, and had arranged to have tea with her in the afternoon. She was quite excited and almost ran up the hill, but Ben plodded along gloomily. His mother watched him.

'Just leave the basket by the door,' she said as she walked towards the fire. 'Oh good! You remembered to take the bread out. And the table's set too. That must have been you, Lucy May. That's grand! Let's all have tea and fresh bread and butter.' She looked at Ben again. 'How about a stroll along the river, Ben? You need a change.'

'But what will Pa say?'

'Leave it to me. I'll deal with Papa.'

Ben smiled at his mother. Perhaps she understood his problems after all.



Chapter 15

The Kite

'Saturday afternoons are *horrid*,' Kate gritted her teeth and jabbed her needle into the patch of tough material on the frock she was mending. 'I've got to do this awful sewing and help Lucy May with her darning as well. She doesn't do a *thing* I tell her.' She grabbed Lucy May's stocking. 'Here. Give it to me. You keep losing the wool out of the needle because you pull it too tight. There's a bumpy edge all round the hole again. You're *hopeless*.' She slashed through the centre of the darn with the scissors. 'You can undo the stupid thing yourself and begin again.'

Lucy May burst into tears and ran to her mother. Kate followed and tried to tell her side of the story.

Mrs Popple said she was sure that Lucy May had tried hard and Kate must be more patient. Lucy May could leave her darning and learn her verses. Kate mumbled sullenly, as she walked away, that when she was that age she *always* had to finish her darning *properly* before beginning to learn her verses. She took the opportunity to put her own mending away, however, then they both took their Bibles from the shelf above their bed and went to find Clara.

Kate always learnt her verses quickly, but Lucy May could not read so Clara taught her by making her recite the lines

over and over again. Mrs Popple and Clara gave the children occasional lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic, but a whole week would often pass without a single lesson.

Lucy May sat on a stool, her face puckered with worry, and kept stumbling over the words. Kate perched on a long-legged, high-backed chair, its shiny seat padded with horse-hair. The thin rail of the chair-back came level with her neck. She kept slipping and wriggling. Neither Clara nor Lucy May took any notice of her, so she began a grumbling conversation with herself:

'Fancy having to sit in a stuffy place like this when it's all warm and sunny outside! Supposed to be "the back end" isn't it? Well, why doesn't it look like it? No red and yellow leaves in the woods, no crackly brown leaves to jump on, no apples and nuts, no little fires burning up the leaves. Silly place this! Only nasty, big fires when people's huts burn down, or the Blacks burn the grass. No big kitchen with a big hot stove only . . .' Then she looked through the open door at the blue sky and distant trees and decided it looked rather inviting after all. She slid to the floor and said, 'Can't we go out? *Please* Clara.'

Clara was so startled she nearly dropped her Bible. 'Yes. Let's,' she agreed. 'Go and tell Mama I'll take you.'

'Can I take my kite?' asked Lucy May.

'Well, yes. But you must ask Mama.'

The children ran outside and found their mother who was trying to control the fowls. 'Quick!' she cried, 'Chase that rooster over there. He's on Pa's new turnip patch.' The children darted off, glad of a run. 'Thank goodness the cock-atoos don't join in yet,' continued Mrs Popple. 'They just sit in white crowds in the trees or go screeching past. I just couldn't stand any more badly behaved animals and birds about the place. Sticky's been a little better lately. That's one comfort.' She fanned her face. 'But that stray pig did a lot of damage yesterday.'

'What about the hen yard Pa made?' asked Kate.

'Poor Pa,' said Annie Popple with one of her long sighs, 'All those branches he stuck into the ground so carefully to make a fence. They *look* all right, but . . .'

'And we put lots of little twigs in between the big ones,' interrupted Lucy May.

'Yes, I know you all tried hard, and it looks very nice. But somehow, the hens get through the smallest place, or fly over the top.' Mrs Popple sighed again.

Kate seized the opportunity to say, 'Please Mama, can we go out now?'

'Next time we come to South Australia,' continued Mrs Popple looking into the distance, 'We must bring lots of fences and . . . What did you say Kate? Go where?'

'Clara says she'll take us for a walk.'

'And please Mama,' pleaded Lucy May, 'may I take the kite that Ben made? There wasn't any wind on my birthday.'

'Yes. If you've learnt your verses. I suppose I can manage the hens by myself.' The children scampered off. 'Wait!' Their mother looked anxiously at the sky. 'It may get too windy. I don't think it's a good idea after all.'

'It will be all right, Mama,' said Clara. 'We'll keep away from trees.'

'Very well. But wash your faces and tidy your hair, children.'

They ran and skipped towards the river. 'I'll see if Ruth can come too,' called Clara as they passed the place where her new-found friend lived. 'Go on a little way, and wait for me on that open patch. But don't go near the water.'

The children walked slowly and demurely until Clara was out of sight. 'Come on,' said Kate, 'Let's have a little fly.'

'No. It's my kite. I'm going first.' Lucy May clung to the kite. 'You can run along with the tail.'

'Oh go on then,' grumbled Kate, 'but hold it up and don't let the string get into a muddle.'

The wind caught the kite almost at once and it rose sharply. Lucy May walked carefully, gradually letting out the string. The kite dipped and swooped, its long tail stretched behind. The children admired it.

'It's my best present,' said Lucy May happily.

'Give it a little tug now and then to help to keep it flying.'

The kite floated and soared. Then it fluttered and began to fall.

'Give it a tug and run with it.'

Lucy May ran and stumbled.

'Run faster, can't you. Go on. Keep it up. Don't let it drop.' Kate grew more and more excited. 'Go on. Faster

than that.'

Lucy May, staring at the kite, tried to follow Kate's directions. She came to the slithery slope near the ford. A sudden gust of wind whirled the kite and pulled the string taut. She felt she was being lifted into the air with the kite. She slid alarmingly, let the string go and sprawled in the mud at the water's edge. The kite, its string streaming, sailed away over the river and disappeared among the tall trees.

Lucy May whimpered and Kate scolded. Then she helped her little sister to clean her hands and knees. Kate was thinking: 'Lucy May looks a fright in her blue stripes, my horrid brown dress doesn't look too bad after all.'

Lucy May sobbed, 'I must get my kite back. It's my best present.' She ran to the stepping stones near the pool.

'You'll never find it,' called Kate. 'It's sure to be in a tree But I'll try.' She hopped over the boulders.

Just then a thick clump of reeds rustled, and out popped a boy. 'What's all the fuss about?' he said.

The girls were so surprised they nearly slipped into the water.

'Billie Jamling! You shouldn't frighten us like that.' Lucy May was very indignant.

'Sorry if I frightened you. But you've spoilt our fishing.' He looked towards another clump of reeds. 'Come on boys.' Two boys joined him. 'This is Barney Tibbs,' Billie pointed to a boy with red curls, 'and this is Dave'. He looked at a short, dark-haired boy with a sallow face and a scar over his left eye. 'His father is one of Mr Thomas' printers. Kate and Lucy May.' He pointed to the girls.

Kate nodded and Lucy May said, 'Hullo Dave. Hullo Barney.'

'Come on,' cried Billie, 'Let's see who can find the kite first.'

Lucy May longed for her kite, but she also remembered her mother and Clara. 'I don't think we should go any further, Billie. We promised Mama we wouldn't go across the river by ourselves.'

'But this isn't by yourselves. You want to get your kite back, don't you?'

'Yes . . . but . . .'

'Oh come on. We'll only be a few minutes.'

Dave turned to Kate. 'You got across the river pretty smartly,' he said.

'Oh that!' Kate said scornfully. 'I can jump and climb too, only I'm not allowed.'

'Come on then,' shouted Dave. 'I'll race you up that bank over there.'

Kate's eyes shone as she dashed off. It was not a very steep bank, but near the water the undergrowth was massed and tangled. Kate scratched her hands aod face and her skirt caught on twigs and branches. She had to scramble up a slippery patch on hands and knees, and hoped Dave couldn't see. Puffing and blowing, she scrambled to the top, arriving at almost the same time as Dave.

'Beat you,' panted Dave.

'Didn't.' Kate wiped her perspiring face on her sleeve.

'I was first.'

'You started first.'

'Oh well! Call it a dead heat.'

'All right.'

They sat and struggled for breath. Kate looked round eagerly at the mysterious land—North Adelaide. At last she was on the other side of the river.

Chapter 16

CORROBOREE

Billie, Lucy May and Barney followed a track from the ford.

'Look! There's your kite,' said Billie, 'we'll never get it down.'

The kite hung from the high branch of a thin gum. Lucy May was looking as if she would cry again as Kate and Dave joined her.

'Never mind,' said Kate hastily, 'I'm sure Ben will make you another one.'

'Please, Billie, couldn't you get it down?' pleaded Lucy May.

'Sorry, Lucy May, but it's too high up. And it's broken anyway.'

'But couldn't you throw a stick or a stone and knock it down?'

'It wouldn't be any good. Kite's always get stuck in trees.'

'But couldn't you climb up like a Native boy?'

'Sorry,' said Billie again.

'I know,' suggested Dave, 'How about doing some tracking for a while?'

'Oh yes please. Do show us.' Kate was thrilled at the prospect of a game with big boys.

They heard Clara calling them. Clara had spent longer with her friend Ruth than she had intended. Ruth was altering her best dress for her wedding, and wanted Clara's advice.

'Oh come on! Don't spoil the fun,' Barney said roughly. 'You spoilt our fishing, and now you don't want to play with us. We came here to help, you know.' The girls felt crushed.

'Go on boys. Show them,' suggested Billie.

Dave and Barney ran a short distance, partly doubled up. They dropped into the grass, wriggled along and then sat and waved.

'Come on,' urged Billie.

Kate and Lucy May imitated the boys.

'Try again,' Billie said. 'Kate and Dave go first.'

'Dave's been here lots of times,' announced Kate as the others caught up with them. 'He's been exploring.'

'There's a Native camp over there,' Barney informed them, pointing to a line of trees and a cluster of bushes to the north. 'I'll take you to see it if you like.' He wanted to impress the girls also.

'Oh goodie!' cried Kate. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, and she had quite forgotten Clara.

'My uncle says they're having a corroboree soon,' said Dave, feeling that he could add some important information. 'If we stalk properly and are very quiet, we should be able to watch through those bushes up there.'

'What's a corr . . . corr . . . rob, what ever is it?' asked Lucy May in a frightened voice.

'Cor-rob-or-ee,' said Dave laughing. 'Sometimes it's a special dance and ceremony they have at special times, or it can be a sort of dance for everybody. Natives from other parts sometimes join in.'

Lucy May nodded although she did not know what "ceremonies" meant.

'Will they mind us watching?' asked Billie.

'Not if it's a fun corroboree for everybody,' answered Dave. 'We'll have to be very careful.'

'Oh don't let's go,' begged Lucy May. 'It's . . . er . . . it'll soon be dark.'

'Nonsense. It's quite safe,' boasted Barney, who really had no idea at all. But he was determined to be the leader of the

expedition. He stuck out his chest, put his hands in his pockets and said, 'You must stalk properly of course, and obey orders. Now, try again.'

Further up the hill, Barney ordered them all to lie down and wriggle forward. 'Now stay down till I give the order. Is that clear, men?'

The girls were so thrilled to be called "men" that they nodded vigorously and said, 'Aye, aye sir,' with the boys.

The grass was long and tickled the children's faces. Lucy May wanted to sneeze, but felt that "men" would never sneeze. Fortunately, Barney signalled that all was safe, so they walked again—very carefully. It was warm, still and silent. The sun was sinking low.

'I think we should go back now.' Kate began to feel uneasy.

'What!' said Barney sternly. 'When we're almost there? Not on your life.'

Kate felt crushed and sure that she would not be allowed to join the boys' adventures again.

'We'll all get punished anyway,' said Billie gloomily, 'so another half hour won't make any difference. As long as we get to the river before dark, we'll be all right.'

'Shh,' warned Barney, 'Keep quiet can't you? Listen! They're chanting. Don't speak anyone, and don't snap any twigs.'

They came to some trees, and Barney crept forward. After a short time he signalled to the others to crawl on. Twigs and branches, pieces of bark and scattered stones made their advance far from silent, but the strange chanting drowned all other sounds. Slowly, the children edged their way between trees and bushes and dared to look.

In a shallow depression, some distance away, a few men were dancing. White lines decorated their faces and bodies and leaves wreathed their legs. They stamped their feet to a slow rhythm and repeated chanting.

'They're all dressed up.' Lucy May was very impressed.

'Keep quiet, can't you?' hissed Dave.

'Women and children who had joined in the dance were difficult to see, but as the men passed a flickering fire they looked like dancing skeletons. Dark faces gleamed and feet stamping the ground raised clouds of dust. Groups of on-

lookers sometimes changed places with the dancers, and the rhythm became a little faster. A small group of women with possum-skin muffs on their hands beat the rhythm on their thighs.

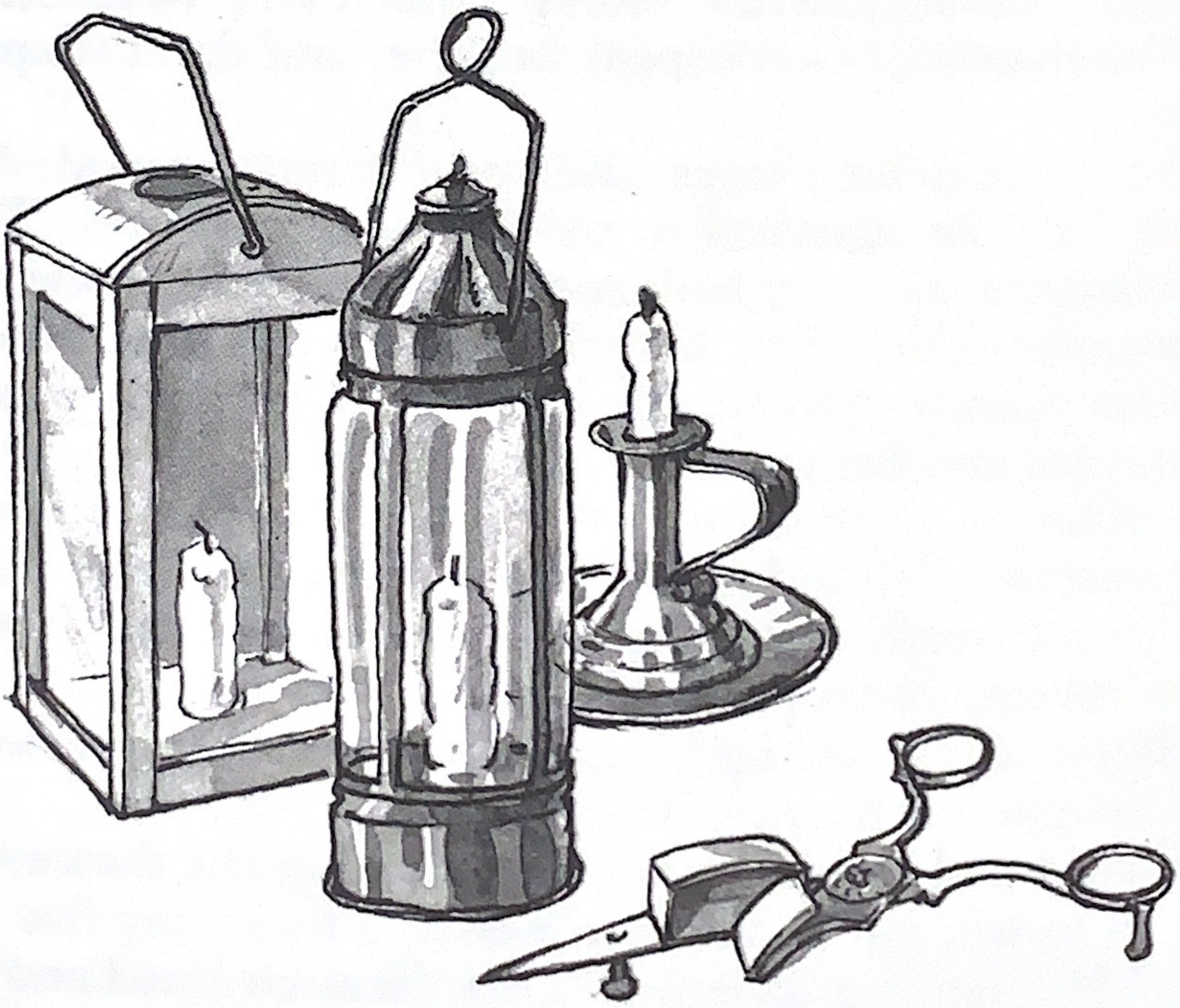
The children peeping through the trees stood like statues, awed and fascinated. But at last Lucy May grew tired of peering through a bush and crept closer to Kate. Kate whispered to her to be quiet.

'Shh! You stupid child!' hissed Barney.

Kate felt humiliated. She turned her back on Barney and peered into the gloom beyond the fire. More people were joining in the dance. A twig snapped. But Kate was the only one who looked round nervously. The chanting, the rhythm, and the dancing enthralled them all. Then the rhythm changed. Feet stamped faster and thick dust flew. Faster and louder.

'Time to go. All ready men?' Barney was the important leader again.

They crept away, the boys reluctantly and lingering a little. Once out of earshot they ran as fast as they could. They didn't stop to speak until they were near the river.



As they groped their way, looking for the ford, they could see a bobbing light here and there.

'They're looking for us,' said Billie grimly, 'We'd better give them a shout. All together now. One, two, three.'

They all shouted.

There was an answering call, then another from further along the river. Two lights moved together and shone on the stepping stones a little to the left. The children slipped and stumbled and picked their way over the wet stones. Ben helped them.

Two men held lanterns; one was Mr Popple. The children were so relieved to be back again that they did not worry about the severe punishment they knew would follow. All except Barney. He knew that his father would be too drunk to notice his absence, and that his mother did not care where he went or when he came home. He drifted away, almost wishing he would be punished too.

Chapter 17

WINTER

Swish! went the strap. And swish! swish! again. Kate bit her lip and muffled her cries, but Lucy May wept bitterly. Mr Popple mopped his face and walked to the door. In the next room, Clara and Mrs Popple sat tensely, their hands over their ears.

Mr Popple spun round. 'That's enough fuss. It's no more than they deserve. Bring a rag or something, Mother. Now girls. Look at me. You can consider yourselves in disgrace for the next four weeks. You have disgraced *me* before the whole town. You are not to leave the property without permission. You must, of course, continue to take your Mother's butter and cheese to families in the city area, but no Sunday walks or cake, and you must learn an extra Chapter each week.

'Billie has been to see me and apologized, and his father and I have visited Barney's parents. Barney is largely to blame. His parents are a bad lot, and no child of mine is ever to associate with them. As for that Dave! What else would you expect from the son of a printer?'

'Please Papa,' sobbed Kate, 'it was my fault really. Not Lucy May's or even Barney's.'

'So you have said before. And as before, I repeat it is not

for you to judge your elders. I have been more lenient with Lucy May as she is younger. But she must learn to do right, no matter what others do. The subject is never to be referred to again. Now you may go.'

Mr Popple turned to Clara. 'As for you Clara, I am most grieved that you were so irresponsible. Talking about wedding dresses and other fripperies when the children were in the greatest danger! See that it never occurs again.'

And so Autumn ended sadly for the Popple family.

After the dust, heat and fierce, blue skies of summer, and mild autumn days, the people of Adelaide welcomed cold mornings, cool days, green hills and green grass. But winter rains often fell in sudden torrents, so most houses were soon surrounded by seas of squelching mud.

Governor Hindmarsh said that any trees growing in the streets could be cut down and used for wood. The people were grateful, as the city area was only lightly wooded. But branches and chips soon littered the ground, and when small trees were pulled out, the holes that remained became deep pools.

All through the winter, Ben worked hard at a variety of jobs. He helped to clear and dig a section off King William Street which was to be sown with wheat; he helped a carpenter to repair wooden huts; and then earnt four shillings a week carting stone. A number of houses were being built of brick or stone, so the stonemasons had plenty of work to offer. Ben always hoped for a day's fishing or exploring in between his jobs, but his father was always ready with something else to do.

Mr Popple could not purchase land for a farm as the country surveying was proceeding very slowly. Like Ben, Mr Popple had to do temporary work. He was often gloomy and irritable.

One dreary morning, father and son set off for work together. They did not look at each other. After a while, Ben blurted out, 'Papa, I'm tired of all the odd jobs I have to do.'

'Do you think I'm not tired of odd jobs then?'

'Yes. I suppose so. But I want to learn a trade and earn a good wage. I'd like to join Colonel Light's surveyors.'

'What! Learn a trade! With Colonel Light indeed! Isn't

farming good enough for you then? How's the family going to manage without you, I'd like to know?'

Ben was silent, so Mr Popple continued, 'I was talking to one of Colonel Light's men yesterday. He said that all their bullocks have been taken to cart the belongings of new settlers. They haven't been paid and there's scarcely any food. They won't want to be bothered with a mere boy.'

Ben turned pale. 'But you know I work hard Papa, and I'm sure I could do something better than casual jobs. If I can't join Colonel Light, I'd like to study for something in my spare time.' Ben did not dare to mention his ambition to study medicine.

'You must be completely daft. Who ever heard of a farmer's son doing any such thing? As for spare time—you should be using it to help your family. I'm disgusted.'

Inside the cottage, Kate peered through a hole in the calico-covered window. 'I'm sick of all this. Either we have to stay here where it's all dull and boring, or do Ben's old jobs. He's being *paid* for *his* work. It's not fair.'

Annie Popple easily overheard conversations and had become expert at sauntering past and changing the subject. 'It's brightening up now after that heavy shower,' she said, 'If you both fetch a load of sticks and chips from that tree in Currie Street, I might have something nice for you when you get back. I asked Mrs Mac to call in this morning. Try to keep away from the puddles, and go across the fields—they are safer than the roads. Oh! Here she is now.'

Clara was sitting under a small window, writing one of her long letters to John. She often wrote, although she knew several more months would pass before she received any news from him.

Then she wrote to her aunt:

'It is very cold at present and we haven't a proper home yet. We sometimes have to wear outdoor wraps in the house, and heavy rain comes through the roof. We have buckets and bowls on the floor to catch the drips and the children often fall over these. We have to put tarpaulins and umbrellas over Mama and Papa's bed and roll our bedding and stack it in the driest corners during the day. We now have

two big barrels, about six feet tall, by the back door, for storing water. These sometimes overflow and make a dreadful mess.

'Some of the roads are so muddy that they are quite dangerous. Mr Jamling, a friend of ours, lost one of his boots last week. A dray got stuck in Rundle Street and it took two hours to dig it out. A horse across the river was stuck so fast it had to be left overnight.

'There are quite a lot of houses now, and a few shops, but no schools yet. There are several wooden buildings where Sunday services are held. We all attend any special services, and of course the children go to Sunday school. Usually we all go.'

Clara stopped writing when she heard crying, talking and scolding outside. Her mother came to the door. 'Just look at this!' she said. 'The third time this week!'

Lucy May, wet and muddy, with cut knees and hands, sobbed and sniffed. Kate looked bedraggled too.

'She's hopeless at jumping,' Kate explained. 'It was quite an easy puddle really, but she would keep staring at that section house that I reckon's ours and Pa sold and shouldn't 've and there was a big branch by the puddle and another in the middle and really and truly . . .'

'That's enough, Kate,' said her mother. 'Go and clean yourself up. Clara, will you please help Lucy May?'

A little later, whip cracks and shouts interrupted them. Kate dashed out of the house calling excitedly, 'Mr Parker's coming.' She rushed round the corner, slithering in the mud. But Lucy May sat huddled up by the fire, feeling sorry for herself.

Mr Parker did not look as smart as on his last visit. His clothes were rumpled and his beard and hair had not been trimmed. But he sounded as cheerful as ever.

'Afternoon ladies. Afternoon young ones.' He bowed in his usual style. 'I could smell your tea right up at West Terrace, and that's a fact.'

Lucy May had been greatly impressed by Mr Parker's sense of smell when he had brought their furniture some months before. She asked anxiously, 'Did you smell Ma's scones?'

Mr Parker hesitated and then said, 'No, my dear young lady, just the tea, I'm afraid. Just the tea.'

'That's because the scones are stale this time,' explained Mrs Popple, 'How about toasting some, Kate? And we can all try my new cheese.'

Mr Parker slapped his stomach and remarked that there was nothing he liked better than toasted scones and cheese. 'I'm very partial to scones and cheese Mam. Very partial.'

He was soon eating scones faster than Kate could toast them, and drank two basins of tea. As on the previous occasion, Annie Popple began to worry in case all the scones disappeared before her husband came home.

Mr Parker stared hopefully at the scones again, but Kate jumped up crying, 'Oh Mr Parker! Do come and look at all the improvements Papa has made. The dairy's finished and the well and . . . and he's put lots of mud on the walls, so they're real thick now. Lucy May and I don't like it though. But,' she added confidentially, 'I've just poked a hole with a stick. That's why I saw you before the others.'

Mr Parker gave one of his half-winks and turned to Mrs Popple who had joined them. He scratched his head as he said, 'What we need here, Mam, is a good supply of stringy bark. We'll never make a go of it without roofs and fences. I've got a load of bark from Van Diemen's Land for a wealthy gent in North Adelaide. Fine cottage he's building there. Worth seeing, I assure you. Stringy bark's pretty pricey stuff you know. Very pricey in fact.'

At the mention of North Adelaide, Kate felt she should change the subject. 'Where's "fat-necked Toby"? Is he knocked up?' She tried to wink at Mr Parker.

'O Kate!' exclaimed her mother.

'Worse than that, my dear, poor thing drowned. You know that sudden storm we had last week? Well, to cut a long story short: At low tide I take the wagon out as far as I can so the loading from the boats is easier like. Well, that storm and a special high tide drowned poor Toby before I could get him back. I had quite a job to save the other bullock. A gentleman's furniture on the wagon had to be hauled back on to the long boat, and . . . er . . . some of it didn't quite make it I'm afraid. You may not believe it Mrs, but the gent was rather unpleasant. Quite unpleasant as a matter of fact.'

Annie Popple said she was very sorry to hear such bad

news. There was a short pause before Mr Parker added cheerfully, 'Still, there's plenty of work so far, and I'll make my fortune yet. Eh young ones?'

Mrs Popple said she hoped he would and enquired after Mrs Parker and the twins.

Then Mr Parker in his most persuasive style asked, 'Now my dear lady, permit me to give a short ride to these two dear children?' He pointed to Kate and Tob.

'Oh please, Mama.'

'Well, just a little way if you promise to nurse Tob all the time and come straight back. You must finish patching your apron before dark.'

Kate promised eagerly, but Mrs Popple still seemed worried.

'I know what's bothering you, Mam.' Mr Parker nodded wisely as he picked up his whip. 'I'll set them down well this side of the Gin House, never fear.'

'O thank you Mr Parker. That's very thoughtful of you.' She waved to Kate and Tob then turned to Lucy May. 'As you now have clean clothes on, you may nurse your doll for a little while. That's a special treat for you isn't it? Tell Clara to get the box out of the trunk, and if you are very careful, you may unfold the tissue paper yourself.'

Chapter 18

The Plains

Kate undid the tent flap and stepped out into the sunrise. She shivered and crouched near the fire. She felt glad that Ben had lit it and made the tea. She noticed that he looked lean, tanned and cheerful and had a bag on his shoulder. 'You're a bit early aren't you?' She yawned.

'I'm meeting Shepherd Long in a few minutes.'

'Oh! Why?'

'He wants me to look for a missing shepherd at Brownhill.'

'Can I come too? Just for part of the way.'

'No. Of course not.'

'Why "of course not"?'

'Don't be silly, Kate. Girls don't go wandering about in the bush.'

'That's very mean! I know how to track and I can walk and look, can't I?'

'Stop being so daft. Stick to the things that help Mama. Things I can't do. She's calling you now.'

Kate gritted her teeth and watched enviously as Ben walked away. Just for once, she would decide for herself. She had been really good for a long time, and felt she couldn't stand it any longer. She began one of her grumbling conversations with herself:

'Lucy May used to go exploring round the camp at Holdfast Bay, didn't she? Well, why can't I have a little walk the other side of the Park Lands? Lucy May says she's watched the Black children playing lovely games. So why can't I? I'll just have a little walk on the Glenelg Plains and find some smoke from a camp fire and follow it. And if I don't see anything, I'll come back. What's the harm in that I'd like to know?'

'I've called you twice Kate,' complained her mother. 'Pay attention please. I'm going to see Mrs Mac almost straight away. She's been poorly all week. Take the eggs and cheese to Mrs Smith, and then ask Mrs Thomson if she's found the pudding recipe she promised me. Lucy May can mind our Tob for a while.'

For once, Kate was eager to be off. She took the basket from the cellar shelf, and feeling very daring, thrust a hunk of bread and a slice of cheese into her pocket. She did her errands and was soon crossing the Park Lands on an exploration to find some Aborigines.

She knew that if she went south, the sun would be over her left shoulder. She whistled a little as it made her feel braver and nobody could hear. Although summer had not yet begun, it was going to be a warm day.

After about a quarter of an hour she began to get thirsty, but told herself that explorers never got thirsty. A wavy line of trees ahead indicated a creek, so she hurried towards it.

The creek had dried to a few muddy water holes with damp patches between. She jumped down hoping to find some running water. She drank from a pool less muddy than the rest, then continued her journey. She could not see any smoke from a camp fire. She checked the position of the sun and plodded on.

The silence, the stillness and loneliness began to worry her. She did not see any person, animal or anything of interest, so she almost decided to turn back. Then she changed her mind and walked on.

Some bright birds flying past reminded her of Lucy May's collection which had been sadly neglected for some time. Lucy May's main interest was her rabbit Twitch.

Small clumps of trees, single trees and patches of long grass prevented any distant views. So Kate decided to climb

one of the low hills to her left, and try to see further. She climbed slowly, puffing, blowing and grumbling. She was determined to get to the top, or almost the top, before turning round. Yes, there was a wisp of smoke in the distance.

She scrambled down hopefully, determined to find the distant fire. She thought about the farm that was mentioned only occasionally now. She was beginning to understand how frustrated her father must feel, and how trying life in the cottage must be for her mother. She felt discouraged herself, so decided to eat her lunch and pretend that she had a big mug of tea to go with it.

After a short rest she tramped on—rather half-heartedly. Somehow the smoke seemed to be in a different place. She thought: 'I'm getting lost. It will get dark and nobody will find me.' She almost cried, but blinked and rubbed her eyes instead. Then she stared and blinked again. Some distance ahead, a man stood up, stretched and began to walk away.

'Help!' cried Kate. She ran and shouted again. 'Help!'

The man strode on.

Kate ran her hardest, and shouted again and again. The man walked on. 'Tally-ho!' she cried, rather weakly.

The man paused. Kate ran desperately, stood and breathed heavily, cupped her hands round her mouth and yelled as loudly as she could.

The man wheeled and answered her wave. 'Strike me pink,' he said, 'It's a girl.'

Kate gasped for breath as she clung to the man's arm. Shepherd Long patted her and grinned kindly. 'Don't suppose you've sprained your ankle on a surveyor's peg have you?'

Kate managed to smile. 'Here,' said Shepherd Long, 'sit down and tell your old friend all about it.'

The shepherd smoked and sucked his pipe for some time. At last he said, 'So you're the sister of that young chap Ben? What a rum thing! I was with him earlier. He said he could yard and drive sheep, so I sent him to Brownhill on his own. Gone to find an old fellow there—sickly sort of chap—been missing for weeks. We want his sheep for shearing. I lent him my dog—best dog I ever had.'

'Lucky thing,' said Kate wistfully, 'He's allowed to go off

on his own, but I'll get into terrible trouble when I get back.'

'I dare say.' The shepherd patted her again. 'But I just might be able to help you out you know. I'll try, anyhow. But,' and he looked at her severely, 'I think you should learn that you haven't a hope when it comes to finding Natives.' He stared about him and after a silence added, 'That smoke's only about an hour's walk away. Can you go that far?'

'Of course.' But the voice was not very enthusiastic.

As they proceeded, the shepherd flapped his face with a spotted handkerchief and spoke in bursts. 'Still living in that hut of yours?'

'Yes. Papa won't move out like Mr Proud Pettiwell who's squatting on some fine land the other side of North Adelaide. Pa says he won't take any land that's not properly surveyed, even if he's down to his last sixpence.'

'Is that so,' said the shepherd. 'Other people won't be so fussy, you know. More ships, more sheep, more people.' He spat with disgust. 'There's too many here already, if you ask me.'

Shepherd Long loped along and Kate found it hard to keep up with him. She was glad when he stopped suddenly and growled, 'There'll be people rushing all over the countryside any day now. You mark my works.'

Kate ventured to say, 'But Papa thinks there is plenty of good grazing land all round, and Colonel Light thinks fruit and vegetables will grow almost anywhere, and vines and olives too.'

'Never mind the fruit and vegetables,' snorted Shepherd Long, 'I've quite enough trouble chasing the mutton.' He thought this a great joke and chuckled and laughed.

They walked and walked, until Kate began to feel that her legs would drop off. Then, as before, the shepherd stopped suddenly. He was looking at the warm ashes of a fire.

'As I thought,' he muttered. 'They knew we were coming and cleared out.'

'But how could they?'

'Beats me. But the Natives know a lot of things we don't, and we settlers'll probably be too clever to learn. Have you taken that in?' The shepherd looked solemnly at Kate, then spat again. 'You'll need a sleep for an hour or so. We'll

finish our walk by the stars. Ever look at the stars?'

'No.' Kate said.

'Pity. You'd like them. Well, let's get on with it. Your folk'll be worried crazy about you by now.'

'I know,' said Kate miserably.

'Can you walk about ten miles?'

'Course I can.' She felt she could hardly move.

'Good. Then we'll rest for a while first.'

Shepherd Long kept his word and Kate was punished less severely than she expected. But for a long time afterwards, Ben kept referring to her as "our gallant explorer".

Chaper 19

Sheep

Ben had walked with Shepherd Long for over an hour. Then, at the shepherd's suggestion, took his dog Rover and turned towards Brownhill Rivulet. The shepherd went on across the plain.

Ben strode along with Rover at his side. He liked shepherds and dogs, and the unexpected opportunity of a day on his own was grand. He was having his first free day for weeks. He whistled gaily, and Rover bounded about.

As he neared the mouth of the valley, he saw a man and a dray under a tree. He hurried, intending to ask the way. Rover ran ahead, barked and then growled. A dishevelled man crawled from beneath the dray, swore, and threw a stone. Rover yelped and backed away as the stone hit his paw. He barked angrily.

Ben stood and stared. 'Oh no!' he exclaimed, 'Not *you*.'

Big Bill stared back and pushed out his floppy lower lip. 'So I've been woken up by *you*. What a damn, bloody insult.' He still smarted from the beating Ben's sailor friends had given him almost a year before. He picked up another stone.

'Leave that dog alone,' shouted Ben, 'He's not mine.'

'Stolen it, have you? Then *I'll* have it.'

Big Bill's beady eyes peered from swollen lids, and his

lumpy, florid nose seemed to spread over half his face. Coarse hair showing through a tattered shirt matched that on his hands.

'Here.' He threw Ben a coil of rope. 'Tie that cur up to the wheel and tie it fast. Do as I say, or there'll be a nasty accident. See? There's plenty of long grass here. See?' He grinned, showing dirty and discoloured teeth.

Ben hesitated, so Big Bill picked up the gun lying beside him. Ben jumped back. 'Not so smart on your own, eh?' Big Bill leered. 'It's not three to one, this time. Now do as you're told and *get out*.'

Ben hurried on, angry and humiliated. He scarcely noticed the splendid trees and thick scrub that crowded the creek, or the grassy hills to his right. But he calmed down after a while and became aware of the sounds of the birds and the gurgling water. He stopped to have a drink and a rest, and soon dozed off in the pleasant shade.

Sudden rustling noises in the undergrowth roused him. Quickly he seized a stout stick. But then, with an excited bark, Rover emerged and limped towards him. The boy hugged the dog, and the dog licked the boy again and again.

'Good boy!' Ben patted his friend and kept on patting him. 'Slipped your collar, did you? Thank goodness. I couldn't have gone back without you.'

He then looked at the hill beside him, feeling that there was something unusual about it. On a cluster of stones, half way up, sat a black statue. The figure did not move. Neither did Ben. Then a tall Aborigine slowly moved down the hill. Rover growled.

'Rover, stay,' ordered Ben.

The man came nearer, sun and shade making flecked patterns on his shining skin. Ben stood frightened and uncertain until he remembered his mother's advice, 'Always offer something'.

Very carefully he looked in his pockets and found a scrap of damper and a corner of meat. He held them out. The Aborigine shook his head, but pointed up the valley, then to Ben and himself. He repeated the gestures. Ben realized that the man wanted him to follow.

'Right, I'll come.'

They walked for about a quarter of an hour until they came to a shepherd's hut. A handsome collie barked loudly. A small flock of scraggy sheep was packed inside a ring of hurdles. Some were too weak to stand.

'They're perishing for water,' exclaimed Ben indignantly, 'How could anyone do such a thing?'

The Aborigine quietened the dog and stood by the door of the hut as Ben peered inside. An old man lay on the floor, moaning feebly. He looked very ill. Ben found a mug, gave it to the Aborigine and pointed to the creek. The man quickly returned with water, and Ben helped the old man to drink. The Aborigine stood tall, straight and muscular, framed in the doorway. The sick man, his grey beard and hair tousled, his cheeks flushed with fever, and his clothes dirty and greasy, looked like a beggar from Ben's home town.

'You're a good fellow, Jo,' said the old man huskily, looking at the Aborigine. Then he turned with difficulty and saw Ben. 'A boy! Who sent you, boy?'

Ben gulped. He felt nauseated by the stuffy, smelly hut. 'I . . . I'm not sure really.' He propped up the shepherd and gave him more water. 'It was in a round-about sort of way.' Then he explained, 'I'm called Ben.'

The old man coughed and gasped before he could say, 'I'm Dan. I've been here for more than a month now. It's only a few miles from Adelaide, but no one has come to see me.'

Ben did not know what to say. The shepherd continued, 'They want the sheep for shearing, is that it?'

Ben was silent.

'I thought so.' Dan struggled for breath. 'Sheep are more important than shepherds. There's plenty of shepherds. They won't miss me.'

'I . . . I'm sure that's not right.' Ben tried to sound optimistic. 'I'll get you to a surgeon somehow.'

'No. I'll stay here. Let me sleep now. But take care of the sheep. I haven't seen them for a day or two.'

Ben looked at the sheep. 'They're about half dead,' he muttered.

Rover wagged his tail and waited eagerly, but the shepherd's dog kept slinking about suspiciously. Jo looked puzzled. Ben knew that as soon as he undid the hurdles, the more able sheep would rush to the water, so he tried to make a small gap only.

Several sheep pushed past him, then one fell across the opening. Ben tried to rescue it and noticed two others that lay helpless in the scramble. When he looked round, the first sheep were struggling in sticky mud at the water's edge. A few fell to their knees. Others following, struggled into the water where their fleeces gradually became saturated. The dogs were confused and barked excitedly.

Ben shouted to Rover, 'Come behind here! Come to heel.' And to the collie, 'Get back, you stupid animal! Come behind!'

Rover obeyed, but the collie took no notice. Ben waded into the stream, seized a floundering sheep, turned it and set it on its feet again. Then he beckoned frantically to Jo.

'Pick them up! Pick them up!' he shouted.

Jo saw what was needed. He grasped a sheep and carried it to firm ground. Then he returned for another. Ben did not know how to work the strange dog. He shouted more orders but it still ignored him. Each sheep he lifted seemed heavier than the previous one. His back, shoulders and arms ached so badly that he thought he would have to give up. But Jo worked easily and did not seem tired.

The man and the boy working together eventually saved all the sheep before returning to the hurdles for the few that were too weak to stand. Then Ben staggered to the creek like one of the sheep. He sat on a stone and bathed his head,

neck and hands. Jo watched from the bank.

'Thank God it's not a big mob,' said Ben. 'We might have lost a lot of them.' He looked up suddenly. 'Food! We need food.'

Again he appealed to Jo. He stood by the ashes of the fire and mimed fire-making. Jo understood at once. He gathered grass, twigs and sticks and soon had a fire blazing. Ben sent Rover to watch the flock. The collie crouched close by.

The boy set a kettle on the fire, found tea, and sugar and some flour for a damper. He almost fell asleep, but the good smell of cooking roused him. He could scarcely wait for the damper to cool before breaking off two large chunks.

Ben ate hungrily. Jo watched for a moment and then did the same. He held out his hand for more.

In the hut, the old man tossed about. Ben offered him warm, sweet tea and a piece of damper. Dan drank the tea, but refused the food.

'Not now boy. I'm past food.' He closed his eyes and coughed feebly.

'But you need it. You'll feel better if you eat something.'

'No. My time has come.' Then Dan whispered, 'Carry me outside boy. I want to see the trees again.'

Ben settled him near the fire. The great gums gleamed in the clear light.

'You're a good boy, Ben,' said the shepherd softly. Then more softly, 'The woods are very beautiful.' He slept again.

Ben looked at the sheep. They had not wandered far. Rover, watching intently thumped his tail in welcome. The collie shared the vigil, but the Aborigine had disappeared.

Ben dozed for a while, then gave Dan more tea and a little damper soaked in tea.

'The sheep, boy,' said Dan suddenly.

'They're all right. They've been fed and watered.'

Ben gathered a good supply of firewood, and found some salt meat. Dan woke and tried to talk again. Ben had to lean over him in order to hear.

'Jo's a good man. He used to come now and then and bring me food. He kept me alive. He's from a camp up the rivulet somewhere.' He had a bout of coughing after this long speech, then added, '*You* talk boy. Tell me about yourself. I'd like to hear.'

Dan looked at him so kindly that Ben, almost without realizing it, found himself telling about his family, their plans for a farm, the hard times they were having and even his secret ambition to be a surgeon. Dan seemed to sleep.

'He's not really interested,' thought the boy miserably.

'Ben,' said the old man suddenly, 'Bring me the book from the pocket of my jacket.'

Dan looked fondly at the old, battered book Ben had found, but motioned to him to hold it.

'You have to have education, son. You can't go far without it.'

'Yes, I know,' Ben blurted out. 'But there isn't any here. Not anywhere.'

The shepherd caught the boy's anger and frustration. He spoke firmly for the first time. 'Oh yes there is. But you have to find it for yourself.' He gathered breath. 'You keep that book and study it. It belonged to my son. He always had a book. Even on the field of battle. He was killed at Waterloo.'

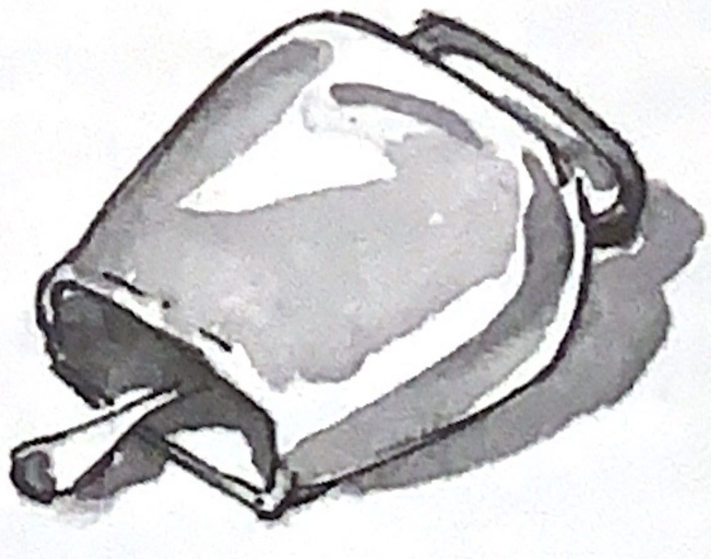
'I'm very sorry.' Carefully, Ben turned the pages of a Latin grammar.

'Give me a few sips of tea, boy.' The shepherd was breathless again. 'Ask one of the preachers to give you a bit of help. You can do a lot for yourself when you're watching sheep.'

'Oh thank you so much! This is the best present I've ever had.' Ben's eyes shone as he fingered the pages.

Then Jo appeared noiselessly. He carried a lamb which he gave to Ben. Ben smiled and thanked him, wishing they could speak to each other.

Later, Ben sat by the fire with the lamb while the old man watched. After a while Dan said, 'Keep it son. You have been very kind to me. My mother used to keep the lost lambs. There's a sheep bell too—from France, I think.' He slept, and then said softly, 'Ask the preacher to bury me here. This is where I belong now.' And after a pause, 'Pen the sheep.'



The sheep were reluctant to move, but Rover, working

quietly and expertly drove them inside the hurdles.

The shepherd's dog padded through the firelight. He licked his master's hand and settled close to him. The dog watched Ben anxiously. Ben patted him and tried to reassure him.

As night fell, Ben cooked again, covered the shepherd, and prepared for a long watch. In the flickering firelight, he looked carefully at the Latin grammar and wished he could read it properly. The old man grew more restless and had long bouts of coughing. He kept throwing off the covers and muttering to himself.

Ben sat anxiously for several hours and prayed for Dan's recovery. 'Please God, make him better, and I'll look after him and help him. Always.'

He stared into the fire for long periods, then found the shepherd was looking at him intently.

'Go to sleep son. I'll be all right. Take the sheep back, but keep the lamb. My mother would like you to have the lamb.'

Ben managed to keep awake for most of the night, covering up the old man at intervals.

Just before dawn he fell into a deep sleep. When he woke he saw that the shepherd was dead.

Chapter 20

LOST AND FOUND

While Ben was coping out on the plains, Lucy May and Kate struggled on with daily chores at home. They played guessing games and sang occasionally as they pulled up the tufty grass and chased the hens. Kate wore her old brown dress which had been lengthened a couple of times and patched with striped and chequed materials. She was growing tall and skinny, her hair hung long and lank, and a few new freckles dotted her nose. Lucy May, her cheeks chubby and rosy, disliked her green dress that had been cut down from one of Clara's, although Kate often admired the frill round the neck.

'Mama's going to have a lot more chickens soon when Specky hatches out her eggs,' said Kate, tugging at a difficult weed. 'Petticoat's broody too. And there'd be ducklings, too, if Snowy hadn't got lost.'

Lucy May sighed and rubbed her dirty hand on her nose. 'I like ducklings more than chickens. But it makes even more work for us.'

'I know. But Mama gets good money from selling eggs and chickens and ducks, and lots of people like her little goat-cheeses.'

'Yes.' Lucy May pulled hard on a big tuft. 'Fancy a gentle-

man coming all the way from North Adelaide to buy a cheese.'

At the mention of North Adelaide, there was a heavy silence. Kate banged a handful of roots on the ground, and Lucy May sat back and gazed wistfully at the bush beyond the river.

'I haven't seen poor Barney for such a long time,' she said wistfully.

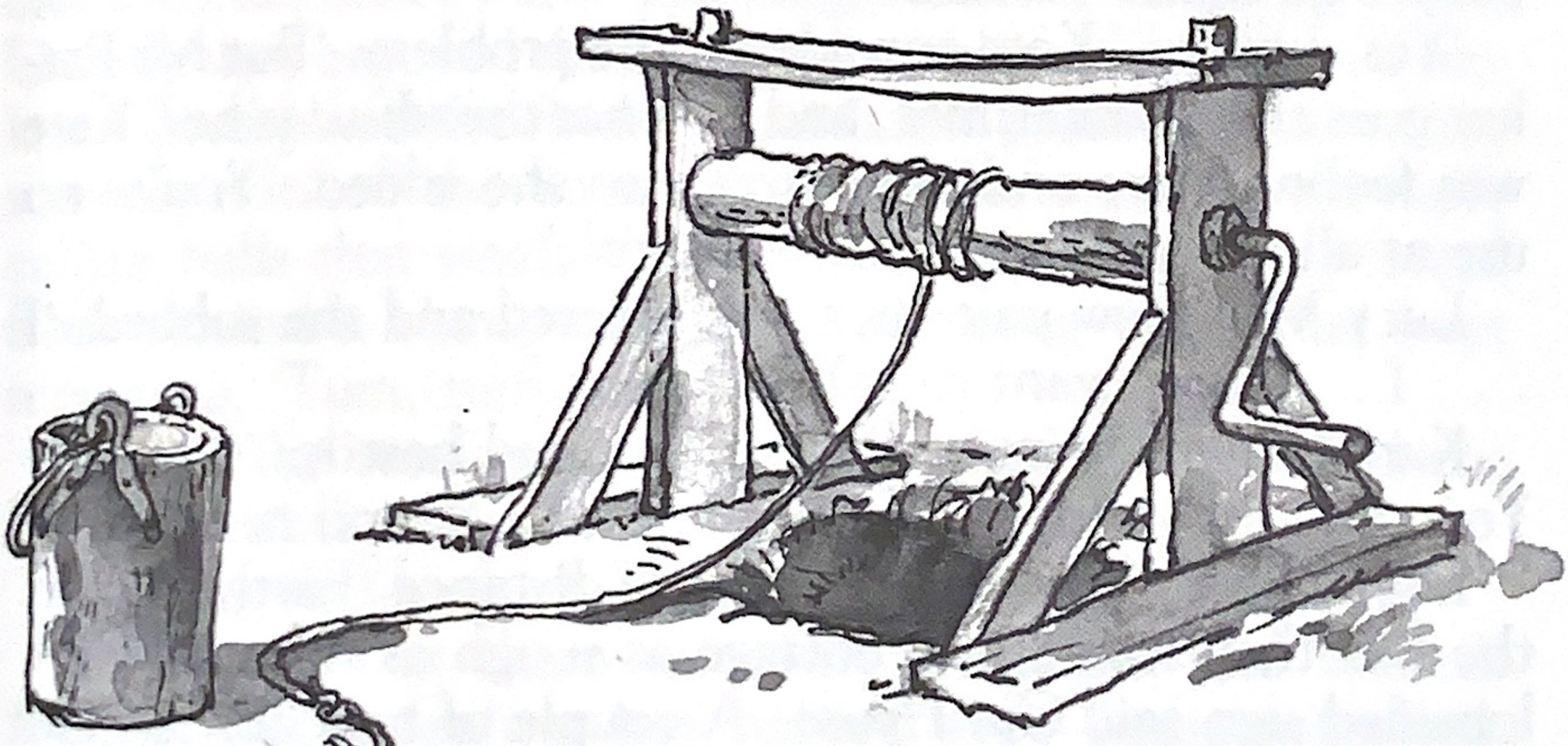
"Course you haven't.' Kate pulled so hard at a weed that she sat down suddenly. 'I heard Pa telling Ma (when I was supposed to have my hands tight over my ears, learning my verses) that Barney's father had been so drunk and dis . . . what ever it is . . . yes, drunk and disorderly, that he had to be locked up. Ma said she thought she should go and see his wife who was in dis . . . another dis something but Pa said she shouldn't go and then Ma said . . . Jinkers! Where's Tob?'

'Fallen down a hole, I suppose,' answered Lucy May absently.' Then, more awake, 'You're in charge. Go and look.'

They both called Tob. There was no reply. They looked, rather casually at first, but soon more urgently. They ran about in all directions, trying the same places several times. They shouted, argued, and almost tripped over.

'Poor little boy,' Lucy May began to sob. 'The fairies must have stolen him.'

Clara had been telling them stories about fairies and goblins who ran away with children. Lucy May felt that every ship that arrived might have fairies aboard. She mentioned



her fears to Kate, and was answered as she expected:

'There aren't any fairies in South Australia, silly,' said Kate. 'They only live in England and Germany and places like that.'

'Then he must be down the well.'

A child had fallen into a well and been drowned the week before, and another had narrowly escaped when she slipped into a water barrel. They rushed to the well. Their father had made a rough cover from branches and a piece of sail-cloth. It was heavy and clumsy, so was not always left firmly in place. They dragged it off and peered below. Water had been found at fifty feet, and the well was half full. They threw in a few small stones and listened as these hit the water. They felt Tob could not be down there.

'We'll have to find Mama,' said Kate reluctantly. 'When she takes a basket of eggs to old Mrs Luke she always stops to talk to Mrs Thomson on the way back. Clara's no use, she's at a picnic—in a cart too, lucky thing. And Pa's . . .'

At the mention of their father, both children looked panic-stricken. He had become so severe and aloof that they felt frightened of him, even when they were good.

'No. Don't go for Pa,' begged Lucy May.

'Then I'd better go to the public house and ask if anyone's seen Tob. I'll have to risk meeting Pa. You go to West Terrace and find Mama.'

'But we're not allowed to go near the public.' Lucy May felt very shocked. She rubbed her nose again. 'Dreadful people go there. Pa said.'

'Yes, I know.' Kate considered the problem. 'But Mr Parker goes there sometimes, and he's not dreadful, is he?' Kate was feeling more and more upset, so she added, 'You're no use at all. You're just a silly little girl.'

Lucy May grew pale, her lip quivered and she sobbed, 'I . . . I . . . only want to get Tob back.'

Kate felt guilty immediately. She said hastily, 'Oh well. You can come with me if you like and . . . and help me.'

Lucy May followed at a respectful distance. Further down the hill they stared at a cottage as rough as their own. A lopsided sign said *Gin House*. A couple of benches, an old table and a cask stood outside. Two men, snoring loudly,

sprawled across the step. Kate put her hands on her hips and said huskily, 'Drunk as lords.' She had heard her father's friends say that. 'The preacher called this place a den of indignity last Sunday. Don't go near, May.'

Lucy May had no intention of going any nearer. She allowed Kate to lead her to the back of the house, moving in a wide circle, in much the same way as they had crept away from the snake on their walk to Adelaide. A sleepy dog cocked an ear and wrinkled his nose, but took no further notice. Nothing moved. There was no sound.

'Come on,' whispered Kate. 'Let's go back.'

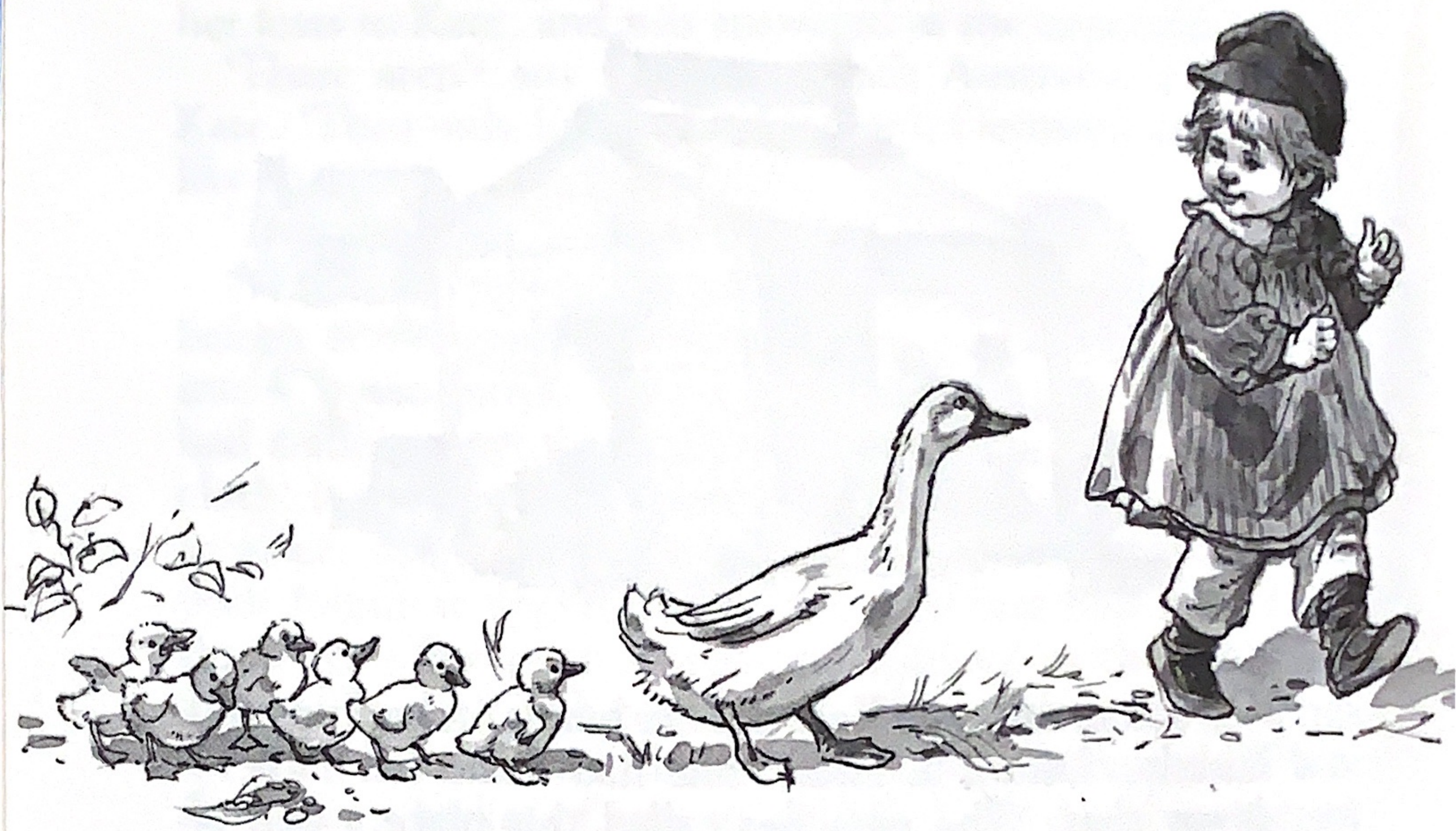
They looked for Tob everywhere, calling again and again. Kate was almost in tears. 'Let's go to the ford and the reed-beds, and if we don't find him we'll go for Ma.'

Lucy May wanted to find her mother at once, but Kate clutched her sister's arm and dragged her towards the river. Usually they enjoyed the river, the scrub and the birds. They knew good places for finding lizards and grubs. But now they scarcely noticed the birds or the wattles massed with fluffy yellow balls that smelt strong and sweet. Then they heard from behind a clump of tea-tree a piping voice that kept repeating, 'Tum, tum, tum wiv Tob.'

Out of the scrub came Tob, and after him waddled the big white duck and a line of six fluffy ducklings.

'Tob!' yelled both children, rushing to pick him up.

Tob looked at them solemnly, stiffened and kicked. Mother duck, feeling her babies were being attacked, flapped her wings and darted at the girls' legs.



The noise and commotion soon died down, but Tob refused to be carried or to have his hand held. The girls walked slowly and awkwardly beside him.

'Listen!' Lucy May stood still. 'Somebody whistled.' The whistle was repeated. 'It's like Pa's whistle only . . . I know!'

The girls rushed for home, abandoning Tob. They raced past the house, almost fell over Sticky and Pansy who were sunning themselves, and on over the rough grass.

'Ben!' They shouted and laughed and almost knocked him over.

'Steady now. Look out or you'll hurt it,' cried Ben.

'Oh Ben!' gasped Lucy May. She stroked the small, white animal in his arms. 'A little new lamb. He's lovely.' She took it from him.

Ben laughed, took off the pack he was carrying and hugged his sisters. 'It's grand to see you again. I feel as though I've been ages instead of just a couple of days, so much has happened.'

'Where did you get him Ben? He's a darling.'

'He's a special lamb, Lucy May. But you may have him.'

'Can I really? For my very own?'

'Well for now, anyway, but Mama can have the wool when he's older. When he's quite old, Papa can have him

and we'll have roast mutton for dinner.'

'Oh no, Ben!' Lucy May felt very upset. 'We couldn't, we couldn't ever . . .' The dreadful words stuck in her throat.

'I was only joking,' said Ben hastily.

'Please Ben, he's mine isn't he?' Lucy May persisted. Ben nodded. 'And Pa has to ask me before he . . . before he . . .'

'Yes, yes,' said Ben casually. 'Come on. I'm starved for a basin of tea. Kate, you can have this. He handed her a bunch of wildflowers that hung from his bundle. Long, slender stems held long, narrow bells in shades of pink and red.

Sharp little leaves tipped with red grew by each bell. 'I think it's called heath. There's stacks of it near Brownhill Riverlet.

'A bit like heather, only bigger and brighter bells.' Kate did not notice flowers as a rule, but now her big brother's present made her feel quite important.

Tob appeared, still toddling ahead of his faithful followers.

'And how's old Tob today?' Ben picked up his small brother.

Tob gave Ben a sour look, wriggled a little, then flopped forward, half asleep.

'Tob! I nearly dropped you. There. Sit in the half dried-up pond with your friends.' The duck and ducklings gathered round hopefully. 'Get a bowl of water for them.'

'I have to nurse the lamb. I'm going to call him Snowflake.' Lucy May turned her back to the company.

'I have to arrange my flowers.'

'Fire needs mending.' Then Ben went to the well. 'Hey! Who left the lid off the well?' Both girls looked guilty. 'You've got to remember Tob, you know.'

Ben filled the kettle and hung it over the fire, gave the ducks some water and unrolled his bundle. 'See! I've brought something for our Tob too. Listen! It's a little sheep bell from France. An old shepherd gave it to me. I . . . I helped him a bit.'

'Ben what did you do?' Kate's eyes shone. She was ready for a good story.

'I'm afraid it's a sad story, Kate. I found an old man at Brownhill who was dying and all alone. He was so kind and . . . and . . . I couldn't go off for help and leave him, yet I couldn't do much for him. It was awful Kate.'

'Oh Ben!'

'He . . . he died last night, and I have to see a preacher, as I promised I would. The old man wanted to be buried out there. I'll tell you all later. Not now.'

Kate could not think what to say. She took the little bell and rang it gently. 'Why are you giving it to our Tob?'

'The old shepherd would like him to have it.'

Tob ignored them all and kept patting the muddy water and mumbling, 'Tum wiv Tob.'

Ben threaded the bell onto a cord, and tied the cord round the baby's fat waist. The bell gave a dull but distinct tinkle

every time he moved.

'Ben! You are clever,' said Lucy May. 'We won't lose him now. We'll be able to *hear* where is is. What a good idea.'

'What's a good idea?' Their mother had been watching for several seconds. 'I'm so glad you're back safe and sound Ben.' She kissed him fondly. 'Tell us all your news.'

Their father, looking more cheerful, joined the group. *I* have some important news,' he announced. 'I have a better job! And on the strength of it I'm buying a good stone cottage. How about that?'

'Arthur! How wonderful!' Annie Popple's face lit up.

'You deserve it, Mother. Life has been hard for you here.'

'Where is it?' asked Lucy May.

'When are we going?' asked Kate at almost the same time.

'Has it got a garden?'

'Are there any fences?'

'How many rooms?'

'Is there a fire-place?' added Annie Popple quietly.

'Wait a minute. Wait a minute,' said the father looking pleased. 'Let me explain. Governor Gawler's getting things moving at last. There will be more work on the streets, the bridge over the River Torrens is to be finished and he hopes to get a decent infirmary built. A shack with six beds is hardly right for a town the size of Adelaide. It all means regular employment for a reasonable length of time, even if it's not exactly what I came to Australia to do.'

'Our cottage is in Angas Street, and we'll move there next week. All the rest is a surprise. But yes Annie, it has a fire-place. Isn't that grand?'

They all felt excited, but Ben said, 'Yes, it is grand, but we'll miss sitting round the fire in the back garden. A proper house with a chimney doesn't seem right somehow.'

'A proper farm would be better,' said Kate wistfully, 'Chimneys don't matter.'

'We'll get the farm all right,' her father assured her. Then he returned to his usual sombre self. 'But we must all work harder and keep the faith. May the Good Lord help us and guide us.'

'Amen,' they said.

'Well. Here's to the farm.' Ben raised his basin of tea.

'To the farm!' they chimed.

PART III

ADELAIDE 1840

Chapter 21

Auction

Lucy May stood in the crowd that had gathered round the post office hatch under the verandah. Men, women and boys kept pushing and shoving her out of the way.

'Kate should've come, not me,' she grumbled. 'Her arms are longer and her eyes are higher up.'

Two men on the edge of the crowd jostled and swore, quarrelled and began to fight.

'Stop that!' shouted the postmaster. 'You must all wait your turn.'

Lucy May managed to edge forward a little, but a big man stuck his elbow into her. She jumped back on to somebody's shoe, then apologized bashfully.

'Never mind child.' An old lady smiled at her. 'Keep close to me, and I'll see you get served. It's always like this when a ship comes in. There hasn't been one in for more than five months now.'

Lucy May still felt frightened. She looked across the street to a row of horses tied to hitching posts. They were harnessed to an assortment of carts, drays and wagons. She heard confused noises—shouts, laughter, barking dogs and cackling geese. A small mob of sheep straggled along the road, almost hidden in a fog of dust, and a group of Aborigines sat and talked at the corner.

'Hurry up there! I can't wait all day.' The postmaster was glaring at her.

'Oh! Are there any letters for the Popples, please?'

'Do you have the money to pay for them?'

'Yes . . . er, no. Kate must have it.'

The postmaster snorted and turned away, while Lucy May, feeling very distressed, moved into a spare patch of shade.

Adelaide had grown considerably in almost four years. The streets were well defined, and shops and offices stood between houses mostly of brick or stone. There was a court house, an infirmary and a jail, as well as public offices, chapels and stores. There were many more hotels—public houses—usually with a blacksmith's shop close by. Spare blocks in the city area were often sown with crops of wheat which grew fast and abundantly.

The Popple's stone house, with a flower garden in front and a vegetable garden with several fruit trees behind it, was at the south-eastern end of the town. It was a comfortable house, but life for the family continued to be far from easy.

Mr Popple had become an irritable and disappointed man for he had still not been able to buy the farming land he wanted. Ben had worked with Shepherd Long on the Glenelg Plain for almost two years. He enjoyed the space and freedom of the shepherd's life, and found some time to study as the old shepherd at Brownhill had suggested. The Rev-

erend Stone had offered to be his tutor and lent him books, but the old Latin Grammar was always Ben's favourite possession. When he began to work for the Harbour Master at Port Adelaide, he was able to visit his tutor occasionally. Mrs Popple encouraged Ben, but his father regarded his study as "a ridiculous waste of time".

Clara worked for Mrs Mac in her baker's shop near the Torrens. John, with his young brother, had returned to Adelaide three years before and he and Clara had become engaged. John was becoming a skilled carpenter. Kate wanted to work like Clara, but had to spend most of her time helping her mother and keeping an eye on the younger children.

Lucy May looked along the street to her right.
Tob, waving frantically, appeared on the opposite corner.
'Wait!' shouted Lucy May, 'Don't cross. I'm coming.'

'Look out girl!' An elegant young gentleman reined in his horse and leant towards Lucy May. 'Don't you know that horses and other animals, not to mention gigs, carriages, drays and the like, rush past every minute?' He patted his horse as Lucy May apologized. 'What's all the fuss over there,

anyway?' He pointed his whip towards a vacant block opposite and on towards Hindley Street.

'It's an auction, sir.'

'An auction, eh? Good entertainment for the populace, I'll be bound. Better than a play or a show, eh?'

'Please sir,' said Lucy May timidly, 'People have to go there to sell their things.' The rider looked interested so she explained: 'A lot of people haven't any work, so they have to sell all sorts of things.'

'Indeed.' The rider was thoughtful. 'Then why aren't they fishing or gardening or making something?'

'Begging your pardon, sir, some of them have to sell their tools and even pots and pans.'

'Doesn't make sense.'

'No sir.'

'Well, can you tell me the way to the *Duke of York*?'

'Yes sir. Go to the next corner and then to the right for a bit. There's a good fence round it, and it's got a second storey pushed up in the middle.'

'Many thanks, young lady.' The gentleman touched his cap, flipped the reins and touched the horse with his heels. 'But watch your step.'

Tob peered at his sister from under a cap that was too big for him. Now that he was six years old, he spent much of his time trying to escape from his sisters so he could watch the people in the streets, the horses and carts, and especially the blacksmiths at work. 'You didn't look. I'll tell Mama.'

Lucy May, three and a half years older, looked at him scornfully. 'Don't you dare.' She pinched him arm.

'Ouch! Then I'll tell Kate.'

'Oh come on.' Lucy May pushed him. 'We're missing all the fun. The auction'll be half over. But Pa's there, remember. We mustn't let him see us or we'll get punished. Where's Kate?'

'Looking through a gap in the palings. Round there.'

'You wriggle underneath. But don't let Pa see you. I'll find a good place somewhere.'

'You're too fat,' said Tob.

While Lucy May was looking for a place with a view, she recognized the voice of the auctioneer.

'Look at this gent's coat, folks. In splendid condition.

Splendid condition. Let's try thirteen shillings. Any offer for thirteen shillings? Very good. Now, fourteen shillings. Worth more than that. Quite a lot more. Thank you sir. Fifteen shillings. Here's your chance to buy cheap and live well. Fifteen and six now. Excellent value folks. Splendid colour and, let me see, all the buttons too. Brass I fancy. Thank you sir. Going at sixteen shillings. Any advance on sixteen shillings?'

Lucy May caught a glimpse of Mr Parker, red-faced and perspiring as usual, balanced precariously on a box as he banged his hammer on a larger box. He then sold a pair of trousers for six shillings and a waistcoat for one and sixpence.

'Lovely lady's dress here,' cried Mr Parker. 'Almost new. Excellent bargain gentlemen, excellent. All smothered with lace over the er . . . over the er . . . front. Velvet bows too. Latest style. How much am I offered?'

'It looks like Ma's best dress. But it can't be.' Lucy May was upset. She decided to look for Kate. Kate had left her place and it took Lucy May some time to find her. She jogged her elbow. 'That dress. Was it . . .?'

'Hold your tongue, can't you? I want to hear how much that work-basket fetches. Now I've missed it. He's going to start on the animals now. Where's Tob?'

'Round there. Under the fence.'

'Here's a nice little animal,' came Mr Parker's voice. 'A family pet, but good for wool and for that Sunday dinner.'

Kate grasped the top of the palings and stood on tip toe. 'It's *Snowflake*,' she gasped. 'He's selling *your* sheep.'

Lucy May's breath came in a great sob. She elbowed her way between two men, tears streaming down her face.

'He can't sell him! He can't! He can't! He's mine! Ben gave him to me! I've got to get through!' Crying hysterically, she fought her way through a clump of people.

Kate managed to catch up with her sister and grabbed her arms. 'Stop making a scene,' she hissed. 'Come back here.' Lucy May crumpled, but continued to sob bitterly. When Tob found them, he was crying too, while Kate sniffed and blinked.

'Come on,' she ordered, and dragged them both to the street corner.

Lucy May's face had become blotched from crying. 'Dear old Snowflake,' she wailed, 'He's so . . . so cuddly and soft and . . .' She clenched her teeth. 'Pa's a nasty, cruel unkind man to sell him.'

'Hush!' cried Kate. 'It's awful, but you mustn't say wicked things about Papa.' She put her arm round her sister who cried louder than ever. Tob joined in.

They suddenly saw somebody they knew. 'What's all the hullabaloo?' he asked.

'John!'

Sailor John, wearing a carpenter's apron, put down his basket of tools, pushed back his cap on his brown curls, hugged Lucy May and patted Tob's head.

'There, there. Try to stop crying. Just a minute. That's better.'

Lucy May made a big effort. 'It's . . . it's Snowflake. Pa's sent him to the auction and the butcher'll . . .' She wept again.

'Gee! That's terrible. Here, try my handkerchief. Hold hard a minute. That's it. Now listen. You Pa's desperate for money just now.'

'But . . . but . . . he should've asked me. Ben said . . .'

'Your Pa's been thinking about selling Snowflake for some time. He didn't *want* to sell him.'

'He could've had my wattle bird—the one Ben cleaned and cured. I would have given him my wattle bird.'

'Now try to be sensible, Lucy May,' said John firmly. 'A

sheep fetches a lot more than a stuffed bird, you know. I shouldn't tell you I suppose, but your Papa has had to use up a lot of his money to buy the stone house and keep the family. You should be glad to help him really.'

'All . . . all right.' Lucy May's breath came in a shuddering sob as she dabbed her eyes. 'But I still think he should've asked me. I'd have let him have Snowflake if he'd asked me.'

'Pa's much more sensible than Barney Tibbs' father and some others.' Kate tried to help too. 'They've sold their tools and furniture even, and they can't grow vegetables any more.' Then she added wistfully, 'But Clara won't be able to finish weaving my skirt now.'

'Ah, Clara!' John's face glowed. 'How about taking a message to your sister, my betrothed?'

None of the children responded.

'It's very important,' urged John. 'I can't go because I have to meet your short friend, Long, at once. If I buy him a pint or two, he may take on my young brother as his shepherd boy. It's very hard to get work, you know. Here are three pennies for a bun each. Tell Clara I must see her outside the shop between one and one thirty.'

'Very well,' agreed Kate. 'Come on you two.'

Tob and Lucy May dragged their feet all the way down the slope to the river. A muffled sob shook Lucy May now and then, and Tob sniffed and wiped his nose on his hand.

'Wish I was Clara,' muttered Kate, 'working all day with buns and pies and cakes and things all round her. Getting eighteen pounds a year too.'

A bell clanked as she pushed open the door of the small bakers shop. The warm smell of cakes and pies was all about them. Clara was serving a crowd of customers. Shelves behind her displayed loaves, cakes and buns, and a container on the counter held several tarts. Kate stood back and watched for a while, but the other children became wedged between a tall man and an impatient woman. 'She's too fat in front.' Tob's whispers were rather loud.

'Shh!' Lucy May pinched him.

'I'm sorry, sir,' Clara was saying, 'but we haven't had time to make any biscuits today.'

'No biscuits? I don't know what my wife will say. Shocking

management I call it.' The man turned and collided with the woman's basket. 'Excuse *me*,' he said tersely.

Clara wiped her hands on her apron and shook back her curls.

'Shocking dry weather we're having,' declared a woman in a corner. 'The dust storms get worse every year.'

'Can't see across the street sometimes,' agreed her friend. 'Most unhealthy. They had to shut the school yesterday, I'm told.'

'The Johnson's dog's been bitten by a snake again,' a fat woman informed the shop in general. 'Head swelled up like a cricket ball. It ran into the bush, came back, slept for a day and was as good as new.'

'Go on!'

A man and a boy squeezed their way out and Clara saw the children. 'What on earth are you doing here? You know Saturday mornings are our busiest times.' She turned to the shelf behind her. 'Two loaves madam? Who's next please.'

'Two custards miss.'

Kate found a space near the counter and whispered John's message.

'Go into the bakehouse and ask Mrs Mac. I'm to busy here. Yes sir,' said Clara brightly, 'what can I get for you?'

The delicious smell increased as the children crowded into the little room behind the shop. Mrs Mac looked hot and flustered under the flour that powdered her face and arms. Two bowls of dough had been set to rise on the bench and a big blob of dough rested on the scales.

She opened the door of the oven in the wall, and the wonderful smell became almost overpowering. Kate gave Clara's message as Mrs Mac came back to her dough.

'Most inconvenient,' she grumbled, 'but Clara can have ten minutes just before one thirty.'

'Thank you, Mrs Mac. That's very good of you,' said Kate.

Mrs Mac smiled at them all.

Kate told Clara the answer and showed John's pennies.

'There's only two buns left,' Clara said, 'so one of you will have to have a queen cake. And Kate, don't let them argue until you're well away from the shop.'

Outside again, Kate gave the orders. 'No talking till you've finished eating. And do try to hurry.'

Tob was determined *not* to hurry. He stopped altogether, began to gulp his cake, choked and had to be thumped on the back. On the corner of King William Street Kate exclaimed, 'Lummee! I nearly forgot Pa's boots.' She added to herself: 'Fancy ordering the things from England, even if they cost three times as much here.'

'And there's the sugar and currants for Ma's pudding,' added Lucy May. 'She'll be waiting.'

'I'll go to the drapers in Hindley Street,' Kate declared. 'And you two will have to go on to the store. And you *must* hurry.'

'But you promised I could watch the blacksmith,' whined Tob.

'There isn't time now.'

'You said that last time.' Tob had a very penetrating voice. 'You *promised*. It's not fair.'

'Oh all right.' Kate said gruffly. 'You can watch while she buys the things. But don't be long.'

She zigzagged across the street and disappeared behind the auction yard.

Chapter 22

A PROPER HOUSE

In the draper's shop, Kate looked furtively at the assistant, Miss Simpring. Her hair was dragged back so tightly from her white face that her eyebrows seemed to be pulled up with it. Kate and Lucy May believed that if ever she changed her hair style, her eyebrows would flatten out. A black bow sat primly under the collar of her white blouse, and a shabby black skirt, whipped in at the waist, matched her hair.

The counter was littered with little rolls of ribbon, cotton reels, boxes of buttons, some artificial flowers, four finely-stitched handkerchiefs and wisps of lace cascading from a wicker work-basket. Three thin bottles holding an assortment of hatpins stood at one end of the counter, under three parasols hanging from their long slim handles. At the other end, several bonnets were arranged on a stand.

Miss Simpring was trying to sell a black lace shawl, elaborately decorated with jet beads, to a customer who did not like black. Kate stared at a nest of pigeon holes behind the assistant. They bulged with fascinating things: odds and ends of silk and velvet, kid gloves, lace mittens, beaded purses, a feather boa and yellow and lilac shawls with long silk fringes.

'Yes, Miss Kate,' said the assistant wearily.

'Please Miss Simpring, have my Papa's boots come yet?'

'I don't think so. You were asking only last week, weren't you?'

'Yes. But he's had them on order for over a year now. His old ones are in a dreadful state.'

'Very well. I'll look.' The dreary Miss Simpring disappeared into a dark little room. 'Yes. They're here. Tell your Papa to come and try them on.'

'Won't it be dreadful if they don't fit!' exclaimed Kate.

Miss Simpring smiled for the first time.

'Billie Jamling!' cried Kate at the door.

'Hullo Kate. I haven't seen you for ages. You look much . . . much nicer.'

'You too, Billie.' Kate blushed.

'Wait while I get a reel of black thread.' Billie came back quickly. 'Will you come along the street with me? You're not in a hurry are you?"

'I am rather.'

'I just have to leave this thread with my aunt. She lives next door to your old cottage.'

'I should go straight home Billie.'

'It won't take a minute. Do you still live in Angas Street?'

'Yes.'

'Then you can take a short cut back.'

'But you know what happens when you take us anywhere Billie.' They smiled at each other. 'Remember how we nearly lost Lucy May at the beach? And that terrible time you took us to a corroboree?'

'Be fair Kate. That wasn't my fault. Anyway we're older now.'

'All right. I haven't seen our old cottage for ever so long.'

But the old hut had been pulled down and a stone house stood in its place. Kate felt sad.

'Poor Papa,' she said softly. 'He bought it for five pounds and sold it for twenty five and thought he had done well. But it must be worth more than one hundred pounds now.'

'Go on slowly and I'll catch you up when I've seen my aunt.'

The scene near the end of Hindley Street had changed. Stone and brick houses with fenced gardens and orchards, a few fields of wheat and some enclosed pasture now studded the rough bushland. Billie, whistling cheerfully, soon caught Kate up.

'How do you like living in Gawler, Billie?'

'Grand, though this is my first day off for months. What's Ben doing?'

'He's working for the customs people at Port Adelaide. He lodges there and comes home for a day every few weeks.'

'What about your farm?'

'Still no sign of it. Sometimes I think we'll never get it.'

'Don't say that. Things must improve some time.'

'Maybe. But we haven't enough money to buy a farm now. Tell me about your family.'

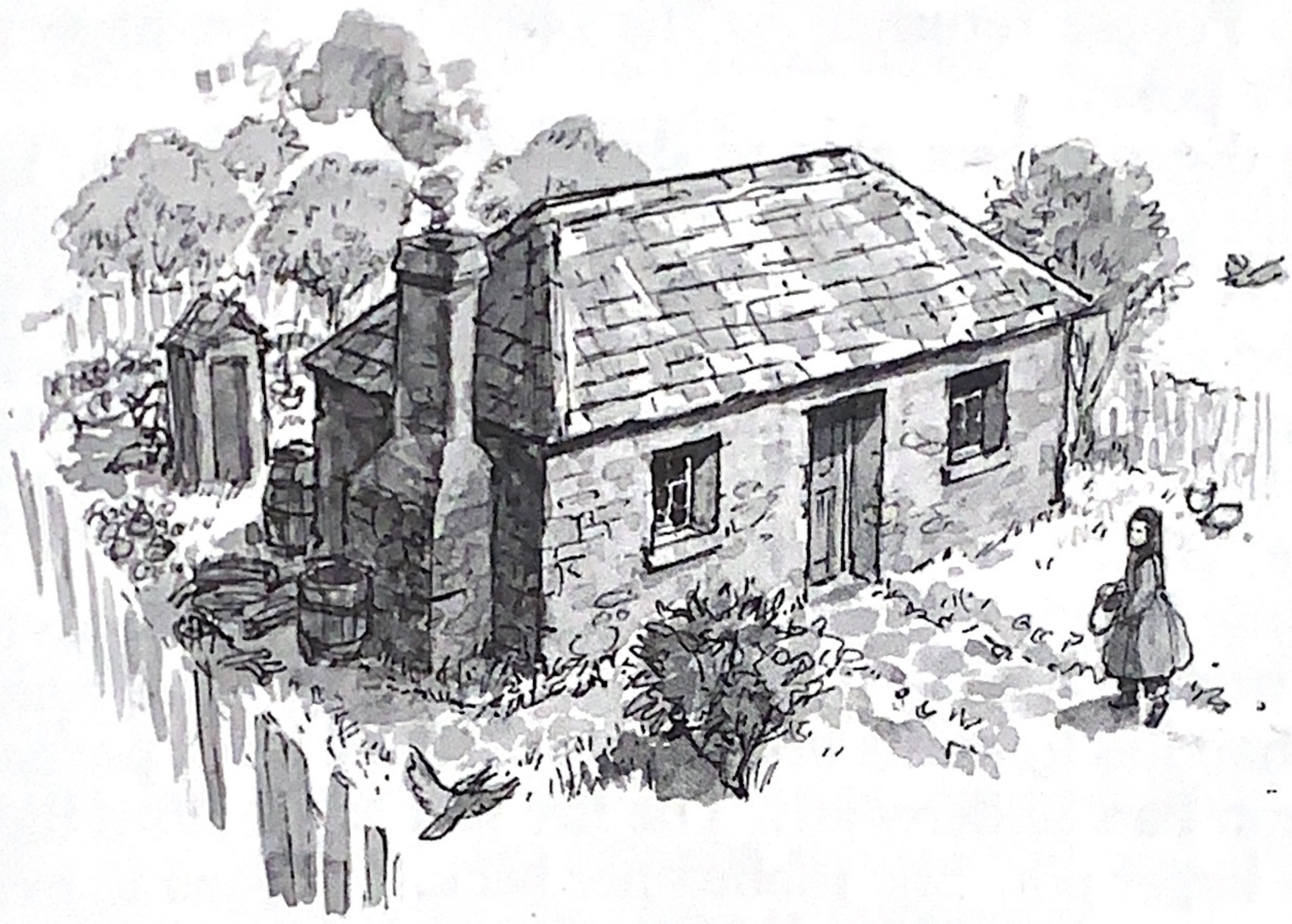
They chatted as they walked through the open bush. 'It's not far from Victoria Square now,' said Billie. 'Can you find

your way through that scrubby patch on your own!'

'Of course.'

'We should be about opposite Angas Street now. I'll have a quick smoke while nobody's looking. Come back if you get lost.' He grinned and waved.

Kate smiled, 'I would be silly to get lost in Victoria Square.'



She ran along Angas Street and then stood for a moment on the narrow path that led to her front door. She enjoyed the scent of their small orange tree, and glanced at the roses and carnations in the garden. Lavender bushes would soon make a hedge to border the path, and geraniums bloomed pink and red along the side fence. Grandma would never believe that geraniums grew as high as fences. She stamped her feet hoping to shake off some of the dust, smoothed her hair and walked slowly along the side of the house. 'It's me, Ma,' she called as she entered the long, narrow kitchen that extended across the back.

'You've been a very long time, Kate,' complained her mother. 'You know your father insists on early tea on Saturdays.' She looked up. 'Don't tell me you've forgotten my things.'

'No, Mama. The other two are bringing them. They should have been here by now. We had some trouble in town.'

'Tell me in a minute.' Annie Popple was sitting on a well-scrubbed chair at a well-scrubbed table nursing a small, white-faced boy. 'Take your little brother for a while, Kate, while I get him something to eat.' She bent over the fire. 'Now Adam, drink the nice broth our Kate will give you.'

Adam, two and a half years old, sat languidly and turned his head away every time Kate tried to feed him.

Mrs Popple returned to the open brick fire-place and found a poker.

'He doesn't seem able to shake off that cold. I do hope he's not getting another bout of croup. He's not nearly as lively as Tob was at that age.' She put wood on the fire, listened as she tapped the big, black kettle with the poker, and looked in the teapot that stood on the opposite hob. 'Oh, here are the children now. Have some bread and cheese, all of you. I've cut the bread.'

Annie Popple adjusted a festoon of chains and hooks that hung from iron arms over the fire. Two copper pots hung by their handles from the hooks, and their old black pot sat on two iron bars underneath. The fire spat as she lifted the lid of the larger pot. She rubbed her back. 'It's good to have a cottage fire-place like a Yorkshire one, but I wish we could afford a kitchen range.' She looked sadly into the fire.

Kate settled Adam in a low chair by the fire. He sat

hunched up and began to whimper.

'Stop dropping crumbs children, and eat outside please,' ordered their mother. 'When you've finished, Lucy May, fetch some wood and find a decent-size cabbage.' She glanced at the grey black marble clock on the high mantelpiece and took down an almost empty spice tin and a wooden salt box. 'There's plenty of time for you to finish your gardening Tob, before reciting your verses. Clara will hear you when she comes in.' She sighed and added, 'It's just as well I have the pudding almost ready.'

Kate followed to a bench by the back door where her mother was mixing the dough. She stacked the shining milk pails and butter moulds, and checked the churn, as she described the auction.

Mrs Popple rolled up the pudding in a floured cloth and dropped it into the bubbling water in the pot. 'I did my best, Kate.' She sighed again. 'I told Pa that he should explain to Lucy May about Snowflake. But he would not have it. It's too late now.' She rubbed her back again.

Kate then realized that her mother did this more often lately, that her face had become more lined and her hair was greyer. No wonder she often complained.

Somebody whistled. They cheered up at once. Ben, tall and tanned, dropped his pack and kissed them. 'How are you both? And how's old Adam?' He picked up his little brother who showed the first spark of interest.

'What a lovely surprise!' Mrs Popple looked fondly at Ben. 'Find some more potatoes, Kate.'

'It's a pleasant walk from the Port, and I know some short cuts now. Is there a pudding?'

'Yes. But you'll have to wait for a while.'

'How's the tea then? Stewing as usual I see. Where's Pa?'

Lucy May ran in. 'I'll tell you outside,' said Kate hastily.

Ben chopped wood near his father's favourite garden patch that grew fifteen varieties of melons. Three generations of goats—Sticky, Pansy and Soppy—watched from a small yard, while two pigs—Crunchy and Grunchy—rooted about in an adjoining pen. Kate sat on the doorstep peeling potatoes, Tob bounced a ball, and Lucy May played with a ginger cat. Angry voices came from the kitchen.

Kate sauntered down the path, pretending a sudden interest in the vegetables. 'Pa and John are at it again,' she said urgently. 'Please Ben, go and say something to soothe Papa.'

'Very well. But I usually do more harm than good.'

Ben kicked the door shut and put an armful of wood in the box by the fire.

The voices became angrier. 'No child of mine shall go to the theatre while she lives under my roof,' shouted Mr Popple.

'But Clara is hardly a child, sir,' John objected.

'She's still part of the family and must obey family rules.'

'But Mr Zolar and his daughter are fine artists and act in a good type of play.'

'Good! There is no such thing as a *good* play. Theatres are not places for young girls. They tell coarse jokes there, and indecent stories as well.'

'But Papa . . . Ben intervened.

'Keep out of this, Ben. There is nothing more to be said. I shall always stick to my principles, and I expect you all to stick to yours.'

Clara burst into tears and ran from the room.

'Your attitude is hardly tolerant, sir,' said John, his face flushed. He followed Clara.

Chapter 23

Rides in Carts

Mr Popple moved the tallow candle closer, shook out the newspaper and read the advertisements. Ben, sitting opposite, watched stolidly. Mr Popple did not seem to like what he read. He muttered to himself and then said, 'It says here that "gentlemen of the pen will find life difficult in South Australia". They're not the only ones, are they?' He read on. 'Here's a young man with a knowledge of drugs and drapery, and his sister of dressmaking, anxious to emigrate. They have "active habits and obliging dispositions", you'll be glad to know. I just hope they remain active and obliging when they've been out of work for six months or more.' He folded the paper and thrust it into his pocket.

Ben took a deep breath. 'Papa, will you and the family come with me to the opening of McLaren's wharf on Wednesday?'

'McLaren's wharf!' snapped his father. 'The likes of us didn't get an invitation, though they say six hundred were sent out.'

'I have to take a cart back,' explained Ben, 'and I'll have room for four or five people.'

'Oh Arthur, it would be such a treat for us all. We haven't been out together for ever so long—except to chapel of

course.' Annie Popple looked hopefully at her husband.

'Surely you don't expect *me* to go?' he said peevishly. 'That McLaren bought a big lump of land for his Company and then insisted that the wharf be built right in the middle of it, not where Governor Gawler wanted. Disgraceful!'

'But he built a grand wharf and a long causeway.'

'Yes Ben. But at a price. It's an absolute scandal.' Mr Popple clutched the edge of the kitchen table and stared angrily at his son.

'But Papa, it's much better than the silly little earth wharf at Port Misery.' Ben moved the candle to the middle of the table.

'Of course it's better! Do you think I don't know about men slipping into the water, and potatoes and flour being left to rot or gnawed by rats and pigs? It's a swindle just the same. And I won't have a word against Governor Gawler.'

'Of course not Papa.'

'And this McLaren dares to . . .'

'But Arthur . . .'

'Oh very well then. You can all go, but I certainly shall not.'

'Thank you Arthur. I'll try to find somebody to mind our Adam, and we'll keep the outing as a surprise for the children.'

'The corner's all muddled up,' said Lucy May looking at the collection of carts, drays, wagons, gigs, horses, bullocks and a donkey or two near the post office.

'Settle down, can't you.'

Ben climbed into the cart and picked up the reins. 'Sit down Tob and keep quiet. I want to get ahead of the coach.'

'A lovely day for an outing,' called Mrs Jamling as she passed. She was sitting on a cushion on a box at the back of a spring cart.

'Yes. It's a beautiful day,' agreed Mrs Popple politely, who was similarly seated.

Kate, looking unusually trim and neat in a new dress that had been cut down from one of Clara's, sat stiffly beside her mother. She glanced about eagerly at ladies in other conveyances who held gay parasols over their finest dresses and bonnets. Some gentlemen in bright coats and top hats fussed

over their ladies, while others dashed about showing their skill with frisky horses. Boys, shepherds and workmen stood about, while dogs barked and scuffled.

Lucy May and Tob sat on bags and sacks on the floor of the cart. They made excited comments, fidgeted and elbowed each other, trying to see better.

'Hold on or you'll be thrown out!' called Ben over his shoulder.

'Can't.' Tob clutched Lucy May.

'Don't do that!' Lucy May tried to free herself.

'Sit still or we'll leave you behind!' threatened their mother.

The children managed silence for a while, but found it impossible to keep still. The road became a jumble of ruts and pot-holes filled with dust, so the family was thrown about in all directions.

'You'd think they could make the road where there aren't any wombat holes,' grumbled Lucy May.

'Don't be silly,' said Ben. 'Do you think the wombats

know what is road and what isn't? Even *people* find it difficult.'

'You're not allowed to call us silly.'

'There go the Proud Pettiwells,' cried Tob.

'And dressed up to the nines as usual.' added Kate.

'Children, don't talk so loudly please,' protested Annie Popple. 'You also get a mouthful of dust every time you speak. Do go more slowly Ben,' she pleaded, 'the dust and jolting are shocking.' She coughed discreetly into her handkerchief. 'I feel rather faint, too.'

'We're almost crawling,' grumbled Ben. 'I want to keep up with the others.'

'Can I have a drink?'

'No. Not yet.'

'Are we nearly there?'

'No. We're only on the Hindmarsh Plains.'

'Try to see an emu or a kangaroo,' suggested Mrs Popple.

'Not likely in all this racket,' said Kate suddenly.

'I beg your pardon Kate!'

'Pardon Mama. I mean they'd be frightened of all the noise.'

'Look at the wildflowers then,' said Mrs Popple hopefully, 'They are a wonderful sight. That must be frankincense over there. Oh *do* be careful Ben!'

A red-faced horseman in a cloud of dust, making frantic efforts to control his mount, came abreast of them. The horse reared suddenly and the rider managed to save himself by clutching its mane.

'It's Mr Parker!'

'Hullo Mr Parker.'

'Morning folks.' He attempted to touch his hat, but the horse had no time for manners. It jerked its head and shot off.

'Poor man. I do hope he's safe,' murmured Annie Popple.

'I hope other people are safe,' muttered Ben.

'He's wearing a funny coat,' Kate said.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Ben. 'What will he work at next? He must be working in the jail.'

'Aren't we nearly there?' asked Lucy May plaintively.

'We haven't come to the marsh and the sand-dunes yet. Port Adelaide's nearly all mangrove swamps and stagnant

marshes and reeds and things.'

'Look out Ben,' cried Mrs Popple shrilly.

Mr Parker, his face redder than ever, his hair flying and coat-tails wagging, galloped towards them.

'He's heading straight for us!' gasped Kate.

'His horse has bolted again.' Mrs Popple grasped the side of the cart.

'He must have forgotten something.' Lucy May tried to get a better look.

Ben dragged on the reins, attempting to pull his horse to the side of the road. The horse swerved. One wheel plunged into a deep rut and the other bumped over a log. Kate and her mother shrieked as the cart rocked and swayed. Annie Popple shrieked again, 'Help! The children have fallen out.'

Ben turned to look as the horse continued towards a tree. It swerved again to save itself, but the wheel ploughed through some bushes then smacked into a tree. Ben jumped clear on the impact, but Kate and her mother became tangled up in the sloping cart.

Two men who had been driving close behind stopped their horse and ran to help. The children were bruised and frightened, but not badly hurt. Tob's nose bled. Lucy May worried more about the horse than herself. She kept urging Ben to do something for a wound in its side. Mrs Popple kept calm, but Kate turned white and whispered to her.

'Really Kate!' exclaimed Mrs Popple. 'Excuse us, please,' she said to the two men who were trying to help, and pulled her daughter into a clump of undergrowth. With trembling hands, she managed to undo an endless row of buttons on Kate's dress. Then she dragged off a layer of petticoats. She struggled with laces, knots and hooks and at last removed a pair of Clara's corsets.

'You silly, ridiculous girl,' she scolded. 'It's a wonder you could breathe at all.' She rolled up the corsets, and much to Kate's disgust, thrust them under a bush. 'And don't come back to look for them in the middle of a storm,' warned her mother. They both laughed and felt better.

When they returned to the scene of the accident, two ladies who accompanied the men had finished some polite screaming and were giving drinks of water to the children. They offered to take the Popple family to the Port.

Mrs Popple hesitated. 'I really feel quite shaken,' she admitted, 'I think we should return at once.'

'With respect, Madam,' said the driver, 'Nobody is going back yet.'

'Do accept our invitation,' urged one of the ladies. 'You may still enjoy the day, and we can arrange transport for your return.'

'I must stay until help arrives,' Ben declared. 'The wheel and side of the cart are damaged and I think the axle's broken.'

'It was Mr Parker's fault,' Kate blurted out. 'He frightened our horse.'

'Please keep your opinions to yourself, Kate,' said her mother crisply. She had been thanking their new friends.

In an awkward silence, Mr Parker, bouncing about on his trotting horse, returned from the rear and managed a few words. 'Nobody hurt I hope. Can't stop now. This animal's turned quite nasty today. Definitely nasty I'm afraid. But . . .' he fumbled with the reins, 'I'll send some suitable equipage for you. I'll . . .' The horse tweaked its ears and shook his head. Mr Parker looked round frantically and dashed off.

'I think you would be wise to come with us,' said the driver, smiling.

As they were all squeezing into the cart, a gentleman and a beautiful lady in a smart gig, paused to commiserate with them. 'Are you all right? Nobody hurt I hope? Ah! My friend and guide, I see.' The gentleman lifted his hat to Lucy May.

'How do you do, sir,' she murmured shyly, recognizing the man who had nearly run over her outside the post office.

'She put me right on several important matters the other day,' said the gentleman. 'I can see you are in good hands already, so good day to you all.'

By the time they arrived at Port Adelaide the Governor had opened the wharf and landed a chest of tea. 'Nearly everybody's cleared out to the marquee "to partake of a cold collation",' muttered Kate enviously, 'Nearly all our luncheon's spoiled.'

'But we've never had a picnic on a wharf before.' Her mother tried to cheer her up. Tob had never been on a wharf

at all, and he and Lucy May were rather frightened at first. They kept staring at the water through the cracks in the planks, and expected the wharf would collapse with the weight of all the people. Slowly, they wormed their way through crowds of excited children and adults.

'There are hundreds of ships on the river,' cried Kate.

'Oh Kate! You do exaggerate,' protested Annie Popple. 'There may be a dozen or so, though there are a lot of little boats too.'

They found Billie and his family at the end of the wharf. Mrs Jamling offered to share their lunch, and Mr Jamling, grumbling under his breath, said there would be room in his cart for the return journey.

Kate did not enjoy herself very much. She was bored by the women's conversation and Billie was more interested in discussing fishing with Dave than in talking to her. They walked about and looked at the customs house and the few buildings that made the Port. Lucy May and Tob had a ride in a rowing boat.

Ben found his family as they were about to leave. He was upset and said that he would have to pay for repairs to the Harbour Master's cart and might even lose his job. 'Yes, the horse is all right,' he said in answer to Lucy May's anxious enquiries, 'I've patched it up, but the Customs people haven't inspected the cart yet. Mr Stowal's been dancing attendance on the Governor all day and I have to wait till he's free.'

'Poor Ben,' said his mother, giving him a quick hug. 'I'm sorry the outing ended like this. It was such a good idea.'

Mr Jamling led a dejected horse to the waiting company. The Popples and Jamlings climbed into the cart, squeezing in with difficulty. Tob had to sit between the ladies, which

did not please him at all.

A high wind and swirling dust made the first part of the journey unpleasant. Then a sudden thunderstorm brought torrents of rain.

Mr Jamling found some shelter under a group of cypress pines and she-oaks, and they all watched as the "cold collation company", as Kate called them, straggled past.

Water cascaded over tiny parasols, stiff little bonnets became pulpy blobs, and mud splattered the ladies' faces. The children giggled and passed remarks as the bedraggled procession passed.

'Poor ladies,' said Annie Popple kindly, 'They must have spent a great deal of time and money on their clothes. It's easier for me, I have only my second-best dress to . . . I have my second-best dress on.'

The sun shone after the rain but it was almost dark as they neared Adelaide. The children slept fitfully in spite of the rough ride. But near Trinity Church a strange glow lit the sky.

Mr Jamling pulled up the horse suddenly so the younger children were jerked awake. They shouted, 'Where are we?' 'What's happening?'

'Calm down there,' ordered Mr Jamling. 'There's a fire somewhere. There've been fires every week lately.'

Tob brightened up at once. 'I want to see.'

'Come on then,' cried Billie.

'Sit down the pair of you,' said Mr Jamling sternly. 'You'll scare the horse. He jumped down and led it. 'There's been enough trouble with pesky horses and children for one day.'

'Oh don't let us go too near,' pleaded Lucy May.

'Oo! You can smell it from here. And it crackles too.' Kate sniffed and wriggled.

'Keep still and leave it to Mr Jamling, children.' Mrs Popple remained calm as usual. 'We shall all see in a minute.'

Two tall gums framed leaping flames. A thatched roof smoked and showers of sparks lit up branches and tree trunks.

'Wait a minute. Oh no!' shouted Mr Jamling. Don't faint Mother. I think it is . . . yes . . . it's *our* house that's burning.'

Chapter 24

Hard Times

The Jamling family stayed with the Popples for several days. The Popples enjoyed the bustle and excitement, and helped to look after the homeless family. Tob had a wonderful time with Tommy Jamling who was about the same age. Mr Jamling said he'd never live in a wooden house again. He'd have everything made of stone or brick, furniture and all. Mrs Jamling kept bursting into tears and imploring her husband to take her back to the Old Country.

'Don't take on so, Mother,' her husband kept saying, 'We mustn't give up for a pesky fire you know.'

Mr Popple lent the Jamlings his tent, and for some time they lived as they had done at Holdfast Bay.

But once the Jamlings had gone, gloom settled over the Popple household. In the kitchen, Arthur Popple slouched at the table, his head in his hands.

'I'm tired of the struggle, Annie.' We came here for a new life, but it's been *worse*, not better.'

'But Arthur, that's not quite true. There are splendid opportunities for young people here. Ben has earned good money and has done well—though he's still pining for an education—and John will soon be a master carpenter.'

'Yes, John has done well enough, but it's high time Ben

gave up his grand ideas. A surgeon indeed! Where's the money coming from, I'd like to know? I've no prospects at all. Me, a farmer—and if I may say so, a good farmer at home. I've done building work, quarried slate behind Government House—many thanks to the Governor of course—and now I'm putting up a fence near the Botanical Gardens. I'm a hewer of wood and drawer of water. It's so humiliating.'

'I know, dear. But things must improve soon. Our hard times should soon be over.'

'It will take more than a thousand pounds to buy a country property now, and I can only raise part of it.'

'Clara's the one I feel sorry for. She needs all her money for herself and should be married by now. She hasn't had a new dress for almost three years. I must help her to get a pretty one for her wedding—somehow.'

In the back garden the children were looking for eggs. 'Everything's gone wrong,' complained Kate. 'This dress is horrid since Mama made me let it down, Papa has *another* job he doesn't like, Adam's poorly again, Ben hasn't any money to pay for the accident (and it wasn't his fault, it was Mr Parker's), the hens aren't laying properly and really and truly . . .' She smiled suddenly. 'I haven't said that for years.'

Lucy May did not smile. 'Bring the bucket here, Tob, and look under that bush again.'

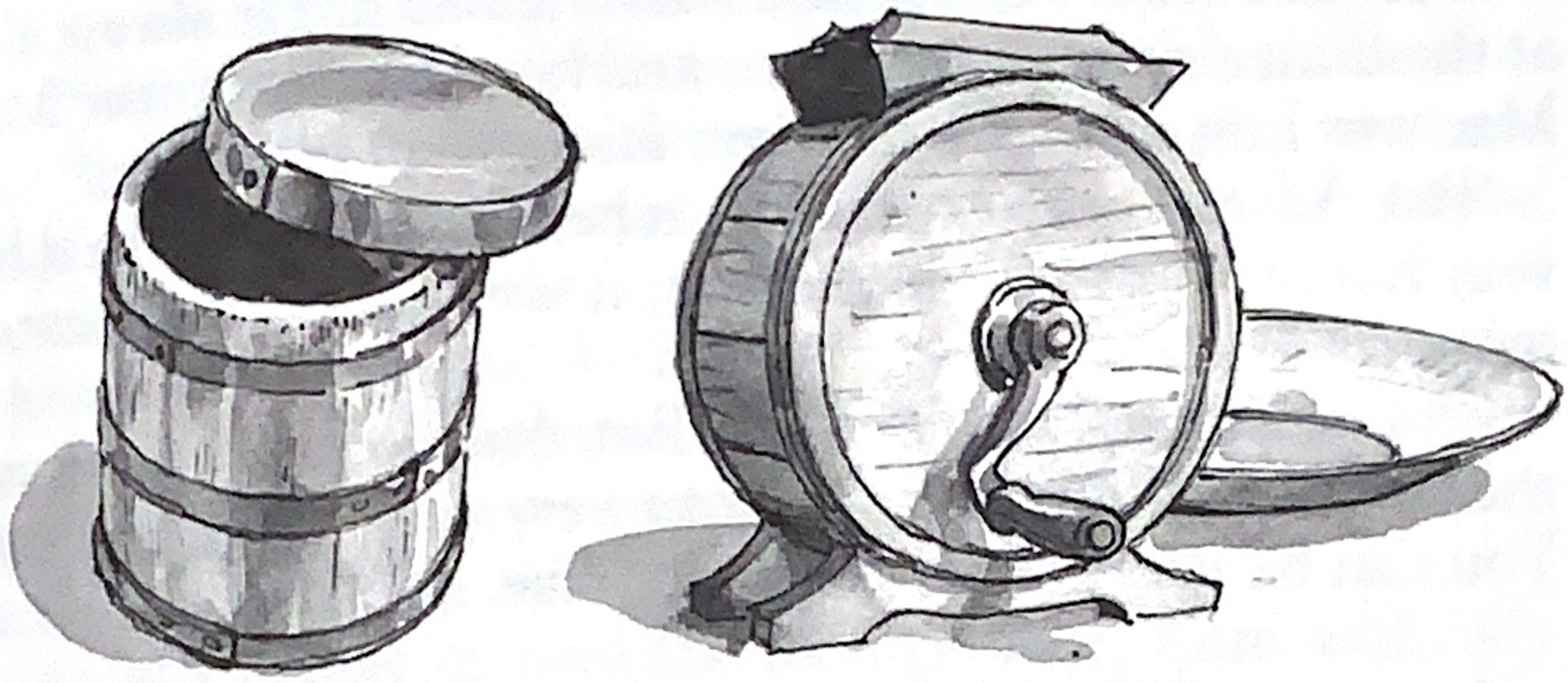
Kate went to the back door. But instead of opening it, she stood and listened. She tip-toed back. 'Papa just told Mama that he hasn't enough money to buy a farm now. She said we were lucky because we can always exchange eggs and butter for flour and sugar.' Lucy May was poking about among the grass. 'Look out! You nearly stood on an egg.'

Lucy May looked thoughtful, 'But she doesn't get any money that way.'

Kate looked worried for a while, then she brightened. 'I know. Let's all try to help more. We could even earn a bit—it wouldn't be much, but it would help.'

Lucy May and Tob agreed at once. 'I'll go and talk to Mama as soon as Pa goes,' continued Kate. 'You two decide what you can do.'.

As Kate walked away, Tob's enthusiasm vanished. 'I can't



earn any money. I'm too little.'

'Oh yes you can!' snapped Lucy May. 'I used to work when I was your age. You're lazy. You just sit in school all day.'

Kate turned the handle of the churn as she talked earnestly to her mother who was kneading dough. 'We think we should do more work, Mama. Lucy May could look after all the animals, not just the hens, then I could . . .'

'But pigs are hardly fit animals for a child to handle,' objected Mrs Popple.

'Papa would have to do some of the work I suppose, but Lucy May could feed them and take the eggs, cheese and stuff to the store and the neighbours without me.' Kate paused suddenly, 'Do you think we'll ever get our farm Mama?'

'To tell you the truth, Kate, I sometimes feel we never shall. But we must keep on hoping. We'll get to the end of the rainbow someday.' She smiled, but her eyes were sad.

'I'm thirteen now,' persisted Kate, 'and I could go to work.'

'Oh no, Kate. You're not old enough. If you really want to help, you could do more in the house.'

'Yes. But that wouldn't give me any money.'

'How about earning a little pocket money then?' Mrs Popple stopped kneading and rubbed her back. Kate saw the worry and concern in her mother's face. 'I would like you to teach Adam to read.'

'Teach him to read! But you don't teach babies to read.'

'I know Kate. It's just an idea I've had lately. I want him to have a better chance than you others have had.'

'But our Tob's only been at school for a little while.'

'Yes. But I don't think he's learning much. He always sits at the dunce's end of the form, and he plays truant too. Mrs Mac saw him down by the river last week.'

'But Adam's not very strong, is he Mama? I think he'd be very hard to teach. And anyway, it won't give us any extra money.'

'You're probably right Kate. But Aunt Mattie's sent me the latest spelling book. It looks very easy. So please try. You can be very patient when you like, you know.'

Later on, Tob came rushing back into the garden and found the two girls leaning over the pig pen. 'Grunchy's getting fat so I s'pose Pa will sell him before Crunchy,' Kate was saying. 'I like pigs. It's not fair that they have to be eaten.'

'I like them too. I hope we have some on our farm.'

'Look what I've got!' Tob rushed up and held out two sixpences.

'How ever did you get those?'

'In Currie Street,' Tob panted. 'Was watching the blacksmith. Overlanders came in. The cattle—all skinny and wild—came right down the street. I ran into the doorway of a public house . . .'

'Oh Tob!'

'I didn't go in. You'd have been scared too. A man got off his horse—skinny and dirty too.' Tob had to stop for breath.

'Go on, can't you?'

'No. I can't. Wait . . . he—the man—said, "Hold my horse boy. Cattle aren't wild. Walked a thousand miles." He dived into the public and came back with froth all over his beard. I sneezed and took out my hankie and he said—I forget.'

'Oh go on.'

'Oh yes. He said, "A lady gave me a comb because I hadn't seen one since leaving Port Phillip three months ago. I haven't seen a handkerchief either." So I gave him mine and he gave me money. See?'

'That's marvellous!'

'How much have you girls got?'

'Nothing yet.' They felt very small.

Kate sat at the kitchen table with Adam on her knee, and the *First Lessons For Infants* propped against the pickle bottle. She looked at her little brother with mingled pity and disgust. He was a shapeless object with layers of flannel bandage round his neck, a woollen pad over his chest and a heavy woollen coat. As he was so delicate, he had to be kept warm, even in summer. He leant heavily against Kate's shoulder. Only his eyes moved—inflamed eyes in a white face—following the zigzagging flies.

As Mrs Popple opened the passage door, Kate said, 'It's too hard for him Mama. It's a stupid book.'

'But he only has to learn three words at first.'

'Yes. But he has to learn that the letters PA spell Pa, MA spell Ma, but BA spells Bay for Baby. I want to leave that one out.'

'You must do what the book says Kate. The Reverend James knows much better than you do. Try again.'

'All right. But his nose is running as usual and his mouth's . . .'

'I know. Young Mr Pothist, the surgeon, wanted to cut the swellings in his throat yesterday, but my scissors weren't sharp enough. He's coming again tomorrow.'

'Please don't let him do it, Mama. It's terrible when Adam screams and yells. I couldn't help to hold him again.'

'We'll see. I think he's a little better anyway.' Mrs Popple took the straw broom and shut the door.

'Now Adam, look at these lovely engravings and the letters underneath,' said Kate brightly. 'It says Ma, doesn't it? Say Ma.'

'Ma,' whispered Adam wearily.

'What do the next letters spell?'

Adam scarcely glanced, 'Pa,' he said.

'No. That's the first one. It's a B not a P. Look. B has two loops and it spells B for Baby. Say B for Baby.'

'Want some water.'

'In a minute. Say B for Baby.'

'B for Baby.'

'Good. Now say Pa go to Ma. Go on. Say it.'

'Pa go to Ma. Water!'

'In a minute. That's right. Now, Ma go to Ba—I mean Bay. Go on, *say* it.'

'Ma go to Ba.'

'No. *Bay* not Bo. You're naughty.'

Tears filled the little boy's eyes and Kate made a great effort.

'Please Adam, I'll give you two currants out of my bun if you get it right. Try again.'

'Bay go to Ba,' said Adam.

'It's hopeless. You're stupid and it's a mad book.' Kate flung the book into the hearth and slammed Adam on to the chair. She stamped her foot and clenched her teeth. 'Mad! Awful! Mad!' She marched to her mother. 'It's a stupid book and Adam can't learn. He's too little . . . and . . . and he's not well enough to even try.'

'Very well, Kate. Dust Aunt Florrie's sofa and I'll go to Adam.'

Lucy May dawdled in the scrub between the house and Wakefield Street, looking for lizards. Something shone in the grass—a coin. She held it to the light and turned it over several times. She thought: 'Papa would say it doesn't belong to me. But I'm going to buy him something for our farm—all by myself. 'She ran into town.'

In the auction yard, a group of men laughed and joked noisily. 'I'm too late. Everything's sold,' she muttered.

'What do you want?' A man like a withered sapling leant towards her. 'Looking for a bargain, are you?' His friends stared and nudged each other. 'Sorry miss, but the diamond rings and pearl necklaces have gone.' He winked and the others guffawed.

'No.' Lucy May hesitated. 'I want something for farming.'

'Farming it is then. Here's a farmer to see you, Dan.' The man pushed Lucy May forward.

'Ah ha!' The auctioneer took the mood of the men. 'What would suit you best, farmer? A nice line in pigs or bulls? Or would a pitchfork or a long-handled shovel be more in your line?'

Lucy May looked round desperately. She noticed an old plough half hidden in weeds. 'What . . . what about that?'

'A wooden swing plough. Ploughed many a crooked furrow. In fact it'll almost swing by itself.'

'Please, how much is it?'

'How much have you got?'

'I've got a shilling.'

'That's not much. But seeing the thing's rotting away where it is, you may as well have it. Here Bert!' He shouted to a pimply-faced boy who had been enjoying the entertainment. 'Get that plough out and put it on the road. Now you men . . .'

'What on earth have you got there?' Billie stood by Lucy May, his hands in his pockets and his tam-o'-shanter pushed jauntily over one eye.

'Oh Billie! Please help me. I've bought a plough for Papa. I'm sorry for him now.'

'But it's falling to pieces.'

'Ben'll fix it. He's good at fixing things. Mostly animals, though,' she added truthfully.

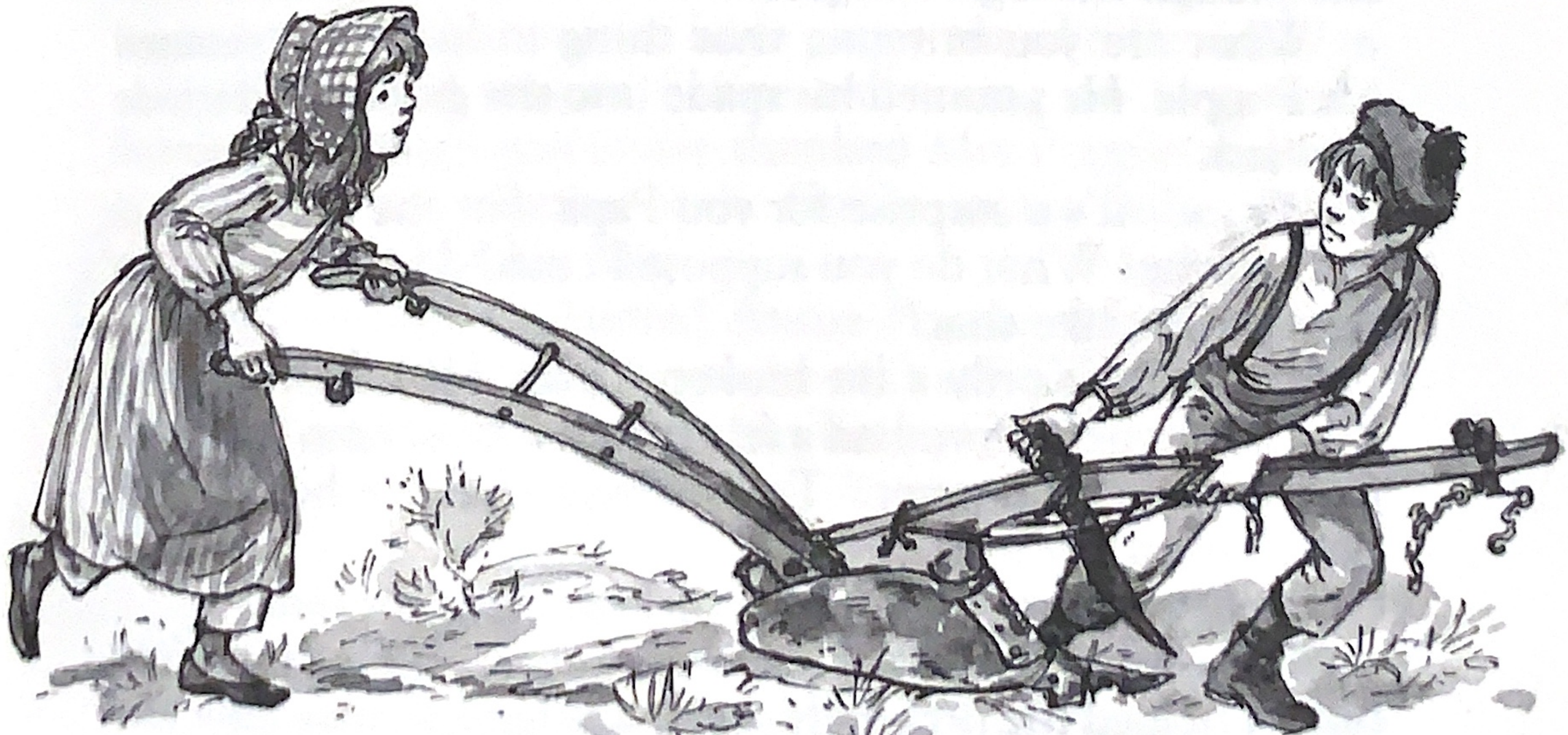
Billie and Lucy May dragged the plough through the weeds to King William Street. 'We'll try pulling it,' said Billie without enthusiasm. 'But I don't think we'll get far.'

'I'm sure we will, Billie.' Lucy May smiled sweetly and grasped one of the handles.

'The mould-board's all rusty and the share's broken,' Billie aired his knowledge.

'I didn't think you knew anything about farming.'

'I do, now I live in Gawler. I helped with the seeding last year.'



They made slow progress. Lucy May kept stopping to rest her arms and get her breath. Passers by stared at them and wagons and carts made wide detours.

'With luck, we'll get there by dark,' said Billie gruffly.

They stopped frequently, then pulled and puffed.

'Oh dear! There's that gentleman I met at the post office and who spoke to us after the accident.' She smiled but did not have the energy to wave.

The gentleman turned his gig and reined in his horse. 'Young lady, where do you think you are going with that lethal implement?' He smiled warmly and raised his hat.

'Beg pardon sir. It's for my Papa, and Billie's helping me to take it home.'

'How do you do, Billie. My name's Princeton, by the way.'

'I'm Lucy May, sir.'

'And where's home, Lucy May?'

'Angas Street, sir.'

'That's a fair step from here. But I think I can help you.'

'Oh thank you sir.'

'Now Billie.' Mr Princeton jumped down. 'We'll tie the plough to the back of the gig and you can guide it. The little lady can sit beside me.'

'What a good idea, sir!' Billie helped their new friend.

When they came to the Popple's home, Mr Princeton waited by the side fence as the children tried to manoeuvre the plough through the gate.

'What are you bringing that thing in here for?' shouted Mr Popple. He rammed his spade into the ground and strode forward.

'It's . . . it's a surprise for you Papa. For the farm.'

'Surprise? What do you suppose I could do with a broken-down thing like that?'

'It's . . . it's only a bit broken.' Lucy May began to cry. 'I . . . I thought if we had a few things for our farm we might . . . get it a bit sooner.' Tears streamed down her cheeks. She dabbed her eyes.

'Excuse me, sir,' Lucy May's friend came forward.

She managed to control her sobs long enough to introduce him. 'I helped the little lady as she was having some difficulty getting her plough along,' explained Mr Princeton. 'She has

real pluck, you know. You must be very proud of her.'

'Yes, of course.' Mr Popple stared at the ground. 'Now I come to think of it,' he said slowly, 'It should be a very useful present. We'll mend it later.' He looked at Mr Princeton. 'Thank you indeed. Will you join us for a cup of tea? We always have water on the boil. Run and tell your mother, Lucy May.'

The two men, with Billie's help, dragged the plough to an empty corner and began an earnest conversation.

Annie Popple fluttered about the kitchen. 'Quick! Fetch the best cups from the parlour. They haven't been used for ages. They'll need dusting. Do be careful. Where's the cloth? The one with the lace border. What are you doing there? Look at your hands. Go and wash them. Bring the bread. Now the butter. There's no cake. Oh dear! The fire's nearly out. Pass me the bellows.'

Annie Popple darted about until Lucy May felt a willy-willy had caught her. Clara came in, smiling. 'I've brought a fresh tea-cake, Mama.'

Mrs Popple managed to stand still for a few seconds. 'Providence must have sent you, Clara. A special visitor is here. Are they coming in yet?'

'No Mama. They're still deep in talk.'

The two men had been discussing farming and continued to discuss it all tea-time. As he left the table, Mr Princeton said, 'I'm very glad I met you Popple. You have some sound ideas about farming in this country. On the whole, I think it's to a man's advantage to have experienced differences in soil, rainfall and seasons before embarking on large-scale farming.' He then graciously thanked Mrs Popple and said good-bye to each member of the family, and to Billie, giving a special smile to Lucy May.

'Goodness me!' exclaimed Annie Popple as her husband shut the door, 'What do you make of that?' She flopped into the old chair by the fire and shut her eyes.

Chapter 25

The Tiers

Arthur Popple drove up to the side gate in a bright green cart with yellow wheels. The children gathered round, chattering and exclaiming.

'All right! All right!', he cried. 'It's not mine. It's Mr Princeton's. I'll explain at tea-time.'

He told them later that he was taking the cart to Mount Barker where Mr Princeton had a property. He would look round, discuss farming, and return a day later. He added, 'Mr Princeton's in the timber business, too, and has a wagon at the Tiers waiting to come to Adelaide. The driver needs the help of a man or a boy. I said Ben would go, as he's due back tonight. So,' he took a long drink from his mug of tea and looked round at them all, 'as a special treat for the children, I suggest they go with me and Ben at sunrise tomorrow, and return on the wagon with Ben. How's that?' Mr Popple looked quite pleased with himself.

The children were so thrilled they nearly upset the tea things, and Tob, who tried to talk and swallow at the same time, as he often did, had to be thumped on the back.

'I'll try to arrange a picnic or something for Annie and Clara as well,' promised Mr Popple. 'They haven't had a holiday for a long time.'

'I've never been in the hills,' said Lucy May.

'Neither have I. It will be wonderful.' Kate's face brightened.

The children were half sleepy, half thoughtful, as the horse plodded up the slope to Glen Osmond. But they listened as they entered the pass. Magpies chortled and parakeets chattered. The road wound into a narrow glen with rounded hills folded round it, and followed a stony creek which was joined by smaller streams trickling down creases in the hills. Huge gums rose overhead, with tiers of wattles, she-oaks and saplings of many kinds beneath. Luxuriant shrubs, some starred with flowers, crowded between, and succulent creepers trailed from branches. Strange birds flitted about, chirping, trilling and screeching.

'Make the most of it,' said Mr Popple, 'for the track soon becomes steep and you'll have to walk.'

Tob lay back and looked at the topmost branches. 'The sky's gone farther away,' he said.

'I've never been in a gorge before.' Lucy May felt overwhelmed by it all.

'The track keeps mainly to the ridges,' their father explained, 'but it'll go through several smaller glens later on.'

They climbed slowly, and the undergrowth thinned out. On the crest of the hill they rested the horse, and looked at the view of the plains and the Gulf. The Port River gleamed in the sunlight, and the sea shone.

'Can we see our cottage? Where's Angas Street?'

'Look! That must be it over there.'

'Come on.' Ben was becoming impatient. 'You can peep at the view as we go along.'

As they descended, the children became silent again, awed by the great trees and the lush undergrowth of the damp gullies.

'Everybody walk again,' ordered their father. 'There's a steep and slippery patch across the next creek. There have been several nasty accidents after heavy rains. The bullocks can't hold back the heavy wagons on the steep pinches, and their yokes slip forward on their necks and injure them. Sometimes the bullocks fall and the wagon or dray rolls over them and they break their necks.'

'That's terrible. Will we be safe coming back?'

'Of course. Unless it rains a lot.'

'Can't they slow down the wagons on the slippery parts?'

'They can only lock the wheels with a chain, or drag a branch or small tree behind. Some people have tried hitching two bullocks behind their wagons.'

'There's been a bad accident here,' said Ben. 'There's half a cart jammed on a stump.'

'Oo! How awful. It's starting to rain, too. Will we be safe?'

'Yes. It's only a mountain shower. Wrap up in shawls or rugs or something.'

But a heavy shower developed, so they sheltered under a clump of trees.

'I want some water,' announced Tob.

'Well, sit with your mouth open.' Kate scowled at him.

'That's not very polite, Kate.'

'Sorry, Papa.'

'There's half a water-melon wrapped in paper somewhere,' suggested Mr Popple. 'Divide it up, Kate.'

Ben lent her his knife and winked at her. She carefully cut half-moons of melon. They crunched and sucked the crisp, rosy flesh, squirting the juice into their mouths, and spitting out the seeds. Tob bit into the middle of his piece so that the ends of the rind touched his ears. He wanted more.

'You're always wanting more of something,' said Lucy May with disgust.

'We haven't seen that Native woman who used to visit us for a long time now,' said Kate. 'She used to like water-melon.'

'I think her tribe moved away,' answered her father. 'They stay for a while and then disappear.'

Kate wiped her hands on the newspaper, smoothed it out and began to read: 'Listen to this: "We have reason to believe that several runaway convicts from New South Wales have found their way to Adelaide." Something about suspic . . . suspicious characters.'

'Oh Papa! Will the convicts come after us?' Lucy May sounded alarmed.

'Not likely, child. Those ruffians don't venture out in the

daylight, as a rule.'

The rain fell more heavily and the children shuddered in the gloom. But after a while the sun shone again and the bush steamed. Gum leaves quivered and glistened and raindrops clung to mossy branches and dripped from trailing creepers.

'Couldn't we explore? Just a little bit?' asked Lucy May wistfully.

'No, my child. We've lost time already. We'll see Mount Lofty soon and then we'll be almost at *Crafters Place*.'

On the next hill, broken branches, scattered bark and jagged stumps showed where the wood-cutters had been. In the valley, the hotel on their right faced a dreary timber yard. Posts, planks and palings of stringy bark were stacked ready for transport to Adelaide, and heaps of rough logs and branches lay ready for the sawyers pit or the long axes of the splitters. Chunks of wood, chips and sawdust were strewn between slushy mud.

'Nearly all the lovely trees have been chopped down,' said Lucy May sadly.

'It's just a boggy desert,' said Kate with disgust.

'The puddles are good,' said Tob eagerly, 'and there's plenty of stuff to kick.'

'It smells.' Kate wrinkled her nose.

'No worse than parts of the Torrens,' Ben informed her. 'It's mostly from the stables.'

'Here we are then,' said Mr Popple cheerfully. 'That must be Mr Princeton's team behind that pile of palings across the road. Seems to be loaded and ready. I'll have a word with the driver while you all have a drink from the well.'

The children ran about until Mr Popple came back.

'The team's ready,' he announced. 'Bill, the driver, is a rough diamond, but he seems to know about bullocks.'

'Oh no!' exclaimed Ben. 'Don't say it's Big Bill and I have to help him? He's an *awful* man. He fought me on the beach, and tried to steal Shepherd Long's dog and . . .'

'Too bad,' snapped Mr Popple unsympathetically. You'll have to do the best you can.' He looked at Ben's worried face. 'Take my advice and go and make a working arrangement with him. Call a truce.' He looked at the sky. 'That thunderstorm's coming up quicker than I expected. You'd

better get back straight away. The track can wash away pretty quickly sometimes. I must go on to Mount Barker if I'm to get there before dark.' He noticed the children's disappointment. 'Here Kate. Go to the parlour and ask the landlady if she's made a batch of her famous scones, and get her to make you up a parcel. I can't wait.' He climbed into the cart, gathered up the reins and was gone.

Ben walked reluctantly through the timber yard, and spoke to Big Bill even more reluctantly. They approached the wagon sullenly.

Big Bill stared at the children disapprovingly. 'Climb up,' he growled, 'and sit well back. Keep that young one in the middle. The whip's long, you know. And *you*,' he glanced at Ben, 'keep out of the way too.'

Big Bill took his long-handled whip, stood beside the middle bullocks and flicked the leaders. He tried to control his swearing. 'Get on there, you blasted Baldy. On there, Red. Jam and butter your bloody hide.' He flicked each bullock, calling its name. They heaved and pulled, the wheels creaked and the wagon groaned as it lurched forward. The team plodded doggedly up the hill.

The children enjoyed the scones, dripping with butter,

and marvelled again at the hills and gullies, at the tall timber, the lush undergrowth and interlacing creepers. Rain fell again.

'Mountain showers. It'll soon stop,' said Ben, not very convincingly. But the sky had grown dark and a thunderstorm rolled in from the north-west. Rain fell steadily.

On the long ridge before the steep descent, views of the plains were blurred by driving rain. The track had become sticky and boggy.

'Look! There's someone behind us,' called Kate.

'A woman,' said Ben, 'and carrying an enormous load. Bare-footed too.'

'Where could she have come from?' asked Kate.

'Hahndorf, I expect. The women from there sometimes carry over a hundred pounds of hams, butter, cheese and bacon to Adelaide, and carry stores of the same weight back again. You girls used to think that you had heavy baskets to carry for Mama, but that woman's back will be completely covered by her pack.'

'She must be very strong.'

The woman caught them up. 'Afternoon, Mutter', said Ben.

'Guten Tag, Bursche,' she answered.

'Let us carry your pack for a while so you can rest your back.'

'Danke schön.'

Ben helped to heave her load on to the wagon. The rain fell in torrents but the woman did not falter or look up. The children huddled together, wet and miserable, their hair plastering their faces. They had to keep ducking their heads in order to dodge overhanging branches and wet, swinging leaves.

'How shall we manage the slippery pinch?' said Ben to Big Bill.

'Don' know. Dangerous.'

'Gefährlich!' echoed the woman.

The bullocks slipped and stumbled. Big Bill swore and shouted warnings. The children felt more and more frightened, but the woman trudged on, sure-footed, determined. On an almost flat stretch of road she cried, 'Halt! We will look.'

Big Bill stopped the bullocks and followed the woman round a curve. When he came back he said to Ben, 'It's very steep there. We'll try dragging a branch. Where's the axe?'

'Halt!' cried the woman. 'A better way.' She held out her hand. 'The axe.'

'But . . .'

'The axe,' she repeated. 'We will stop the wheels.'

She took the axe, slithered a little way down the bank, found a straight and sturdy sapling and chopped it down expertly. When she had trimmed the branches, Big Bill and Ben dragged it to the road.

'Nun,' said the woman, 'der rope.'

She placed the sapling across the back wheels and looped the rope round it. She and Ben passed the rope under the wagon to the front where Ben tied it securely.

'Fester. Fester,' ordered the woman.

'I know,' said Ben suddenly. 'I need a lever to twist the ropes and keep them tight. This short branch will do. This should slow us up.'

'We'd better get down, hadn't we?' suggested Lucy May.

'Yes. And what ever happens, stay well behind the wagon.' He looked at Big Bill, 'Ready?'

Big Bill swore and shouted to his team. The wagon moved slowly at first, but round the curve it gradually gathered speed. 'Hold back there, you lousy pole bullocks. Jam and butter your muddy hides you muddy butters.'

The wagon slithered down the hill, dangerously fast. 'Tighten the rope,' shouted Big Bill. 'Fester. Fester,' cried the woman. She watched intently, shouting at Ben. 'Tight. Tight. More tight.'

The leading bullocks stumbled and almost fell. The pole bullocks staggered. Big Bill swore loudly. The wagon slid alarmingly fast. 'Fester,' urged the woman. 'More. More tight.'

The wagon slid slowly, 'Nicht so fest,' she said. The wagon ground to a halt in a stony stream that crossed the track. Ben loosed the rope and the woman handed him the sapling. 'For der little hills,' she explained, 'Nicht so gefährlich.'

Ben felt exhausted. 'Thank you so much,' he said.

'Thank you,' echoed the children. 'Danke schön.'

'Viel Dank.' The woman smiled. 'I go now. Der ox goes

slowlier than I.'

Ben helped her to shoulder her load. 'I shouldn't like to carry that,' he said.

The children waved as the woman disappeared among the trees. All were silent as they wound their way through the pass. They were tired, tense and hungry, and watched the track anxiously. The trees and creepers, the birds, insects and flowers did not impress them. They sighed with relief when they came to the sparsely wooded hills of Glen Osmond.

'Fancy me thinking I could drive a bullock team when I grew up!' said Kate.

Chapter 26

The Picnic

Hard work and dull routine continued until early November. But one afternoon the door flew open and Arthur Popple strode into the kitchen, threw his wide-brimmed hat on to the table, and announced, 'The news is better for me at last.'

The family stared at him in astonishment.

'I'm afraid that was a bit abrupt,' he apologized, 'but I'm starting a better job tomorrow. I'm going to do some prospecting at Glen Osmond. A few men are going to work there and I'm one of them. It's better pay and it means I can spend the occasional free day helping Mr Princeton on his property at Mount Barker. Mr Princeton seems to have taken a fancy to our family, largely due to you Lucy May.'

'That's wonderful,' cried Mrs Popple.

'Better still,' continued Mr Popple, 'Mr Princeton will probably let us have some land there in the New Year! That's a double surprise, isn't it?' He smiled round at his family. There was silence and stillness for a moment.

'You mean we're really going to get a farm?' asked Kate in an awed voice.

Her father nodded. Then they all began to talk at once and asked question after question.

'That'll do for now,' said Mr Popple at last. 'There's plenty of time to find out about it. But as a special celebration, we'll have a picnic tomorrow at Glen Osmond.'

Another outing! And for everybody! The children could not believe their good luck, but Clara and Annie Popple were not very enthusiastic at first, as the weather had been very hot for some days. However, Clara became as excited as the children when she found that John would join them.

Next morning a breeze from the south made the hot weather pleasant. At Glen Osmond it waved the brown and yellow grass on the upper slopes of the hills. Grey and mottled rocks bulged between the short grass on the lower hillside, and occasional clumps of trees made welcome shade. Kookaburras laughed, and a flock of rosellas glowed among dark green leaves. A clear, bright day.

Mrs Popple and Clara spread the picnic cloth while the children scampered about. Adam, in a new white suit, sat and stared at first, but soon trotted about collecting "treasures" in much the same way as Lucy May had done three years before.

'It will do him the world of good,' said his mother tenderly.

'Let's sit and enjoy the scene, Mama,' Clara suggested. 'The children are happy and will come back when they're hungry.'

The men, who had been making a fire, joined them. John put his arm round Clara, and Arthur Popple sat close to his

wife and patted her hand. 'My dear, it's a wonderful feast. It's a perfect day. I shall always remember it.'

'Yes,' agreed Annie Popple, 'if Ben could have got away from his work at the Port it would be perfect.'

'It's a pity they have to blotch the hill with mining,' John observed.

Mr Popple bristled at once. 'We haven't done too well with farming so far, have we? We need something else to employ people, surely?' He was often short tempered with John.

'Well yes, I suppose so. But we need more food, not more people. It will be dreadful if mining towns spring up in this beautiful country.'

'It's all very well for you, John. You now have a trade in the building business. The more towns there are, the better for you, I should have thought. But farmers are two a penny. Look at the speculating in land going on. People are paying a hundred pounds and more for twelve shilling and one pound blocks. But cheap land for farming—oh dear no!'

John always enjoyed an argument, but saw that the women were looking distressed. Fortunately, the children raced back—starving. They settled down quickly, eyeing the good food.

'Fold your hands and give thanks to the Good Lord,' said their father. He said a special grace. Mrs Popple had bought some chicken as a surprise, and they all ate hungrily.

She looked at the dazzling blue sky. 'Nowadays we don't eat chicken out of doors, as we used to when we were camping out,' she said.

'Chicken's good anywhere,' John observed, biting on a plump piece.

'There are pies, too,' said Annie Popple proudly. 'I've used the last of the imported flour. You'll have to put up with the local flour from now on—dust, bran and all. It's much cheaper.'

'But remember, there are five kinds of melon, fresh from the garden,' said Arthur Popple proudly. Then he added, 'We must be thankful to our Heavenly Father for all our blessings. Now, let us all rest for a quarter of an hour or so.'

'You made a good fire, Papa,' said Kate. 'The tea always tastes better out of doors. Remember the first fire at Holdfast

Bay? And when you and Ben walked to Adelaide and came back in the dark? Lucy May and I thought you wouldn't be able to see our tent, so I tried to make a flag to hang up.'

'You got rid of one of your petticoats that way,' laughed Lucy May, 'and I wanted you to sew a blue moon on it. You said "moons aren't blue" and tried to stop me, and . . .'

'Weren't we silly,' Kate interrupted. 'They wouldn't have seen the flag anyway.'

'We've had many disappointments,' their mother said quietly, 'but life in our stone cottage is much easier. And next year we should be living in our farmhouse. It will be wonderful.'

They talked about their experiences in the colony and about their friends and relatives in England, and the time passed quickly.

After the picnic things had been stacked in the cart, they played games—Oranges and Lemons, Nuts in May, and Sheep, Sheep Come Home. The children laughed and giggled at the grown-ups who joined in, so they kept suggesting more and more games. Much of the ground was stony and sloping, so they kept slipping and tripping and this added to the fun. Mr Popple and John took it in turns to carry Adam as they ran, and he gurgled with delight.

Mr Popple then led them to the excavations to show them where he would be working. They scrambled over the pile of rubble in front of it, and took turns to peer over the crumbly edge. They were disappointed because they could only see blackness inside the sloping tunnel.

'You children can play about again,' said their father, 'while John and I climb to the top of the hill. There should be a fine view of the Gulf from there. Watch your step, though. I think a few fellows have been doing some digging

on their own there to the right.'

'And sun bonnets on please,' insisted their mother. 'The wind is dropping so it will get hotter.'

'Come on then, John. We'll see you in a little while, my dear.'

Tob and Lucy May raced away but Kate tugged at the strings of her bonnet. Adam began to cry.

'Kate. Take Adam with you for a while.'

'Yes, Papa.' But she thought: 'Bother! There's always someone to spoil the fun. It used to be Tob. Now it's Adam.' She took his sticky hand and tried to catch up with the other two. 'Wait for me.' She picked up Adam and tried to hurry, but the others rushed ahead.

Then she put Adam down, dawdled and grumbled to herself. Tob and Lucy May waited in the shade of two she-oaks.

'Whew! It's hot!' Kate leant against a grey trunk and fanned herself. 'It's your turn to take him now. I'm going to rest in the shade for a bit.'

Tob and Lucy May took Adam's hands and swung him over sticks and stones. He chuckled and laughed. They followed a slanting track and disappeared behind a fold of the hill.

Shouts and cries and a dog barking ahead, made them stop. A shot rang out.

'It must be hunters. Let's go to that big rock further up and watch.'

'Go back to Kate, Adam,' said Lucy May. 'She's just back there.' She pointed, then ran after Tob.

From the left, further up the hill, three kangaroos leapt away wildly. A man and a boy appeared in a dry gully.

'Keep going, they'll never catch you!' shouted Lucy May to the kangaroos.

'Good on you. Hop faster!' cried Tob.

Two kangaroos flashed past, but the third floundered for an instant as she threw a joey from her pouch. Another shot rang out.

'He's killed her. He's killed her,' screamed Lucy May charging up the hill.

A man and a boy were whooping triumphantly as Lucy May rushed up.

'You shouldn't have killed her. She had a joey. It's not

fair.'

The man looked round nervously. 'Mind your own bloody business. You nearly got yourself shot.' He nudged the boy. 'Better clear out.'

The joey rolled over and over and then sat and trembled. Slowly it loped down the hill as Adam watched, fascinated. 'Doggie. Doggie,' he called and waddled towards it. The joey, alarmed by the new danger, sat with its little front paws together and its ears twitching. 'Doggie,' called Adam again.

The joey flipped round, and hopped up the hill. Adam followed. The joey jumped into a patch of long grass and disappeared. Adam clambered over the edge of some piled-up earth and staggered forward.

A muffled cry.

'It's Adam!'

Tob ran and Lucy May ran. 'Adam! Adam!'

No answer.

'Adam. Where are you Adam?'

No answer.

Kate, lolling under the she-oak, heard them calling. She ran too.

'Where's Adam?'

'I thought he was with you.'

'No. We sent him back to you.'

'He called out.'

'Which direction?'

'He must've fallen over. Why doesn't he answer?'

'He can't be far.'

'Over there in the grass.'

'Come on then. No. Wait.' Kate tried to be practical. 'Tob, go back for Papa. No. You go Lucy May. You can run faster.'

Kate stood panting. Tob doubled over with a stitch. 'He must have fallen down a mine tunnel.' Tob was on the verge of tears.

'Nonsense. But be careful in the long grass, just in case.' Tob searched, desperately, in circles. Kate looked round carefully. 'Oh God!' she gasped, 'I know what happened.'

Annie Popple and Clara saw Lucy May's urgent signals and sped towards her. The men noticed the commotion and

charged down the hill. Kate ran to a small platform of earth with grass at its sides, and almost fell into a gaping hole. She knelt and leant forward, shading her eyes.

Somebody threw her roughly out of the way. 'Let me look.' Her father took her place. 'I think he's there. About ten feet down.'

They stood in shocked silence. Annie Popple pushed forward, her eyes wild. 'I must get to him.'

'Hold her, someone. I shall need a rope.' John rushed off.

A shuddering sob broke from Tob. The other children wept also. Then stifled sobs. Stillness and stunned silence. The breeze swished the long grass.

Mr Popple spoke in a harsh whisper. 'Move back and sit by your mother, children. That is an order. Hold her tight, Clara.'

John tied the rope to a tree. 'Let me go down, sir. I'm used to ropes and climbing.'

'No. He's my child. I must go.'

John lowered the rope down the hole and helped to steady the father. 'Signal when you're ready.' He knelt and watched.

Silence and stillness. The long grass waved—the yellow, brown grass.

Mr Popple climbed back. Exhausted and his face ashen. 'A stone. His head. I think . . . he's dead.'

'No! No!' cried his wife, attempting to break free.

Arthur Popple spoke sharply. 'Annie. You must control yourself. Clara, take the children away. Go with them my dear.'

'No, Arthur. I must stay. I . . . can manage now.'

'Very well. Go back with the children, Clara, and do what you can.'

Back at the house, the children collapsed on to their big bed and cried bitterly. Clara crumpled up on her little bed in the corner and wept with them. When their grief lessened a little, she gathered them to her and tried to comfort them.

'We must try to be brave,' she murmured, 'It is God's will.'

'It was my fault. I was cross with him.' Kate broke into loud sobbing again. 'I was often cross with him. I am wicked.

God will never forgive me.'

Lucy May stifled her tears for a moment. 'It was my fault. I ran off and left him by himself. I am the wickedest.'

'No, children,' said Clara calmly, 'you didn't know what was going to happen. You didn't know there was a hole there.'

The children wept again and would not be comforted.

Clara waited. Then said more forcefully, 'We must think of Papa and Mama, not ourselves. Papa will blame himself because he took us to a place that was not safe. And Mama—remember she's lost two babies now. Pray with me to accept this great sorrow, and believe in God's will.'

Mr Popple came out of the parlour. He looked fondly at them all. 'Leave us for a while longer. We shall pray together later. John has taken the cart and will fetch the Reverend Stone. I hope Mrs Mac is on her way by now. Your Mother needs another woman with her.' He shut the parlour door.

A little later, Mrs Mac kissed them all. 'He was too good for this world,' she said quietly. 'God wanted him. Now!' She became her usual brisk, efficient self. 'People will be calling soon, so let's all help. Tob, fetch some kindling. Fill the kettle, Lucy May. And Kate, you set the table. We all need a good cup of tea.'

There was a knock at the door.

'That'll be a neighbour or the parson, I expect,' Clara opened the door. 'Oh!'

Mr Parker stood there smiling broadly. 'There's good news for you all,' he said. He smiled again. 'I've just been to the Port and paid Ben's fine. The accident with the cart was partly my fault, you know.' He stopped abruptly. 'Anything wrong?'

Clara managed to tell him. Mr Parker looked upset. 'Anything I can do?' he asked. 'Anything at all.'

'Well, yes,' said Clara. 'If you can find Ben and tell him, we'd all be glad.'

'Of course,' said Mr Parker eagerly. 'I'll find him, even if I have to go all the way back to the Port again.'

Chapter 27

HARVEST

'It's all yellow like the beach,' said Lucy May.

'And it's wavy like the sea,' said Tob.

'It smells sweet and sticky,' said Kate.

Tob bounced about. 'It's as high as me. I'm going to jump into it.'

'Don't you dare.' The girls pounced on him.

Tob struggled angrily. 'Let me go. Aw! You're hurting me.' He looked at the small stooks edging the field where some of the wheat had been scythed for hay. 'I'll play then, and you can't stop me.'

'Phew,' sighed Kate, 'I feel like a stuffed crow in this crepe and bombazine. Why can't we leave off our mourning clothes when we're working, I'd like to know?'

'Oh Kate! You know you must show proper respect for poor Adam.'

'I never said we should *stop* mourning did I? All I meant was . . . Oh never mind! All we can hang up is our bag with the water and luncheon in it.'

The first big wheat crop had ripened by the middle of November, and the whole population was urged to gather it in. Mr Popple had smiled as he told his children that he expected them to help with the harvest. 'It will be useful

experience,' he said. 'Next year we may all be working in our own fields, God willing.'

The girls and Tob looked at the colourful groups of men, women and children who were preparing for the thrashing in the early morning light. Coats, shawls, hats and bags hung from branches on the few trees.

It looks like washing day at Holdfast Bay,' Lucy May said.

Kate laughed suddenly. 'We could run about and look at people's clothes there, underwear and all. We found out that Mr Parker wore a flannel cummerbund round his stomach, and old Mrs Thomson had purple patches on her pantalettes.'

'Yes.' Lucy May agreed. 'Washing days were fun then.'

'I don't remember.' Tob screwed up his eyes in the bright light.

"Course you don't. All you could do was toddle about and fall in the dirt and rub your eyes. We had to take it in turn to look after you. You were a nuisance.' Kate's face clouded as she remembered Adam. 'I'll hang up the bag.'

When she came back, the others had begun their work. With several of the younger children, they were picking up

handfuls of wheat stalks and banging the heads against some logs and casks until the grain fell on to canvas spread on the ground. They threw down the straw which other children raked up. A big boy leant on a rake and bossed them about. Kate watched with a bored expression.

'Top of the morning, Popple children.' Mr Parker waved cheerily. He was wearing an old green coat and trousers, with his gold watch chain pulled across his bulging stomach, and a broad grin on his florid face. The girls smiled and greeted him warmly, but Tob scowled. 'And how's your dear mother, children?'

'Much better, thank you.'

'Glad to hear it. Very glad.' Mr Parker picked his teeth with a twig. 'Anything I can do for you, my dear young people, just let me know. Anything at all.' He waved and walked on.

'Oh Mr Parker!' Kate ran after him. 'Are you in charge

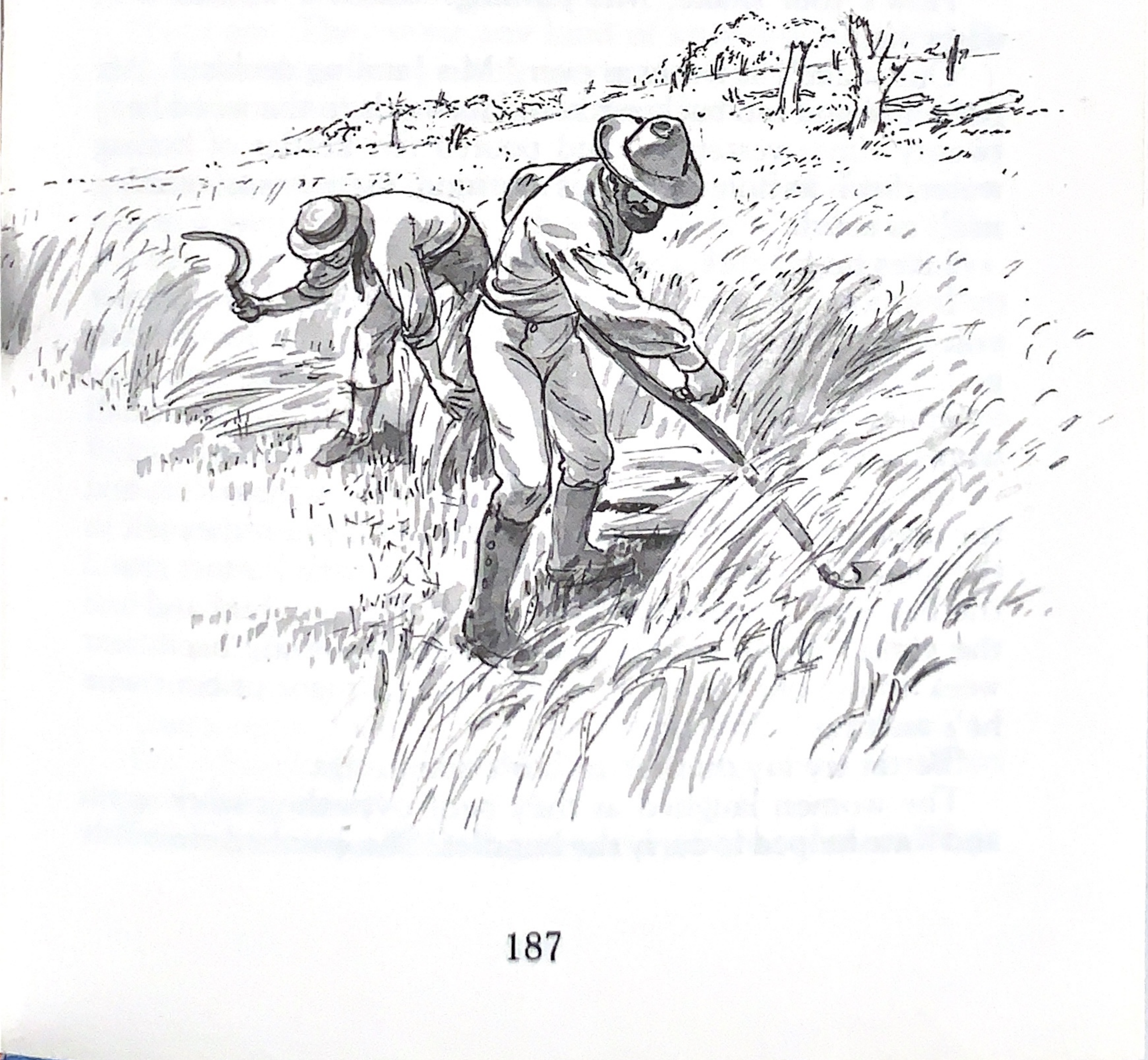
of the people with the flails today?'

'Why yes. I'm the flailing manager, as you might say.'

'Please could I help them for a while? There are plenty of children helping with this silly bashing job.'

'Well now. It's hardly work for a young lady.' Mr Parker put his hands in his pockets and spat carefully. 'But have a try if you like.' He spun round to admire a woman who displayed a froth of lace petticoats as she swung some sheaves on to her shoulder. 'Er . . . yes.' He picked up a flail and waved it about. 'There's an art in it you know. Watch those boys for a while.' He handed the flail to Kate and trotted off in the direction of the lace petticoats.

A short, grubby boy nudged an even grubbier boy and jerked his thumb towards Mr Parker's retreating back. 'A fat lot *he* knows about it.' They laughed as they showed off their skill, sending the grain flying. A man with a stick and another with a rake drew the straw into a heap, while another



collected the dusty seed from the canvas. Kate decided to try something else.

'Too hard for you, eh?' sneered the short boy. 'Call again some time, smartie.'

Kate blushed. She looked at the field and the sky. Yellow and blue. The hot wind rippled the wheat and the sun beat down. Labourers and gentlemen worked doggedly, leaving swathes of wheat on the ground. Kate joined a group of women who were gathering it up and tying it into bundles with a twist of stalks and a special knot. Other women—mostly in plain petticoats—carried armfuls of sheaves to the thrashing area.

'Hullo dear!' Mrs Jamling, breathing heavily, dusted her hands. 'It's like a big picnic, isn't it?'

Kate wanted to laugh because Mrs Jamling wore the straw bonnet that had been drenched in the rain after the opening of McLaren's wharf. It looped and drooped over her face, and her efforts to control it made it flop more than ever.

'How's your snake, Mrs Jamling?' asked a woman with wispy hair.

'Our snake's as lively as ever,' Mrs Jamling declared. 'My poor husband ran backwards and forwards to the wood heap twenty times yesterday, and poured ten kettles of boiling water down its hole. And this morning, there it was, sunning itself as usual.'

'Likes heat I reckon. Try cold water.'

'It's most awkward,' continued Mrs Jamling, lowering her voice and glancing round carefully, 'as the girls are afraid to go to the privy once it gets dark, even with a lantern.'

'How's your husband's toothache, dear?' asked a small woman, peering out of a large well-starched bonnet.

'Got worse than ever,' replied the wispy woman. 'He and the doctor had a good drink together, and when they felt in the mood the doctor tugged at the tooth with his feet round the bed post, and our Freddie hung on to my husband and the chair. Tooth snapped off. Doctor's coming back next week to dig out the roots with a special piece of bent wire he's making.'

'Better try my mother-in-law's dumplings.'

The women laughed as they bent over their work again and Kate helped to carry the bundles. She watched enviously

as two young lads, flourishing pitch forks, stacked sheaves on to a sledge, while an old man staggered off with a laden hand-cart.

A little further off, two boys sliced the stalks neatly with reap-hooks. The swathes of wheat lay along the ground like foam on the sand. I could do that, thought Kate, and went back to the trees.

'What've you got there?' Lucy May was glad of an excuse to stop work.

Kate carried something wrapped in a shawl. 'I'm not going to do this easy work. It's a waste of time. I'm going to . . .'

'It's *not* a waste of time,' flared Lucy May. 'We have to do anything we can, to help. It's important. Pa said.' She glanced at some men sitting in the shade, drinking and laughing. 'You're not going to get like *them*, are you?'

"Course not. I'm going to do something different. That's all.' She unwound the shawl and held out a carving knife.

'Oh Kate! You're not going to . . .'

'Yes I am. They want any kind of knives don't they? Pa said. Other people are using carving knives.'

'And look at the scars all over their hands. You shouldn't do it.'

Kate shrugged her shoulders and sauntered off. The yellow wheat waved in the hot north wind. Yellow and blue. The sun beat down. Swish! Swish! Went scythes and reap-hooks. The women deftly tied the bundles. The old men raked up the straw. Flails rose and fell. Men pushed and pulled sledges and hand-carts.

Kate hacked at the dry stalks with her carving knife and found it harder work than she had thought. A boy with red curls worked his way towards her.

'How's the reaping going?' he asked.

'My knife's too blunt.'

'Hey! Haven't I seen you somewhere?'

'Oh yes! You're Barney Tibbs, aren't you?' We once saw a corroboree together.'

'That's right. I was blamed for everything—as usual.'

'Yes, I know. But I couldn't do anything about it. What are you doing now?'

'Fending for myself. Doing any odd job that comes along.'

'Oh. I'm sorry.'

'Want that knife sharpened?'

'Yes please.'

Barney took out his whetstone and rubbed it along the knife. He felt the edge carefully and cut a few stalks. 'Try that.'

'Thanks, Barney. That'll be much better.' Kate pulled at a handful of stalks and grasped the knife.

'Look out! Don't hold it like that!'

But it was too late. Blood poured from her hand.

'Help!' cried Barney as Kate clutched her hand and turned white.

A smart young man produced two handkerchiefs. He tied the hand tightly but blood still seeped through. Barney added a dirty rag.

'Hold your hand over your head,' ordered the young man.

'Thanks,' said Kate faintly. 'You're young . . . er, Mr Pettiwell, aren't you?'

'Yes. You'd better sit in the shade. You're awfully white.' The boys helped her and she asked them to find her sister. 'If the bleeding doesn't stop soon, I'll take you to a surgeon. I have a gig over there.' The young man looked very concerned.

'No thanks. I'll be all right.'

Lucy May and Tob ran up, looking frightened.

'Find something else to tie round my hand. My shawl. Anything.'

Lucy May found an old towel. The boys waited for a while and then went back to work. Kate assured them she could manage. She asked for a drink.'

Tob ran off, but did not return for some time. 'The bag's not there,' he reported. 'Someone's taken it.'

'Couldn't 've. You looked in the wrong place. I've just seen it.'

'Lots of things get stolen,' Kate complained. 'It's not like when we first came here. I *must* have some water.'

Lucy May went to look.

'Most people've drunk their water by now.' Tob looked enviously at children playing and small groups eating their lunch. 'But there's a water barrel on a sledge somewhere.'

'Old Charlie would have given me some water if he was

still alive,' muttered Kate. 'The new water-carriers sitting on their new, fat water barrels in carts aren't friendly at all.'

Lucy May trudged back. 'Tob doesn't look properly.' She handed Kate the water bottle, then she and Tob began to eat.

'Boiled eggs again,' grumbled Tob.

'You're spoilt, that's your trouble,' snapped Lucy May. 'You've got bread and butter and eggs and cheese. When Kate and I walked all the way to Adelaide from Holdfast Bay in the boiling sun we only had dry bread and pickle. Eat up and go back to work.'

'I can't eat anything. My hand's throbbing,' Kate sounded exhausted.

Lucy May felt worried. 'I'll go and ask Mrs Jamling to look at your hand.'

'Wait!' called Kate. 'I just want to rest.' But Lucy May hurried off.

She found the group of women chatting busily. Old Mrs Thomson had joined them.

'How did you get on with your coffee grinder dear?' asked the old lady. 'Oops! some wheat's gone down my neck. Oops! It tickles.'

'I ground and ground and the children ground and ground,' Mrs Jamling struggled with her bonnet again. 'And at last out came some brown, gritty flour. Made good porridge though.'

'I cook the wheat just as it is. More tasty,' said the wispy woman.

'What we need is a decent windmill. Something ought to be done about it.' Mrs Thomson hunted for stray bits of wheat in her underwear.

Then Mrs Jamling noticed Lucy May. She ran to help Kate as soon as she heard the story.

In the afternoon, the hot wind whirled the chaff and dust, and the children slipped away to play whenever they could. Adults constantly sent them back to their jobs. Men with scythes and reap-hooks swore when children ran near them. 'They're more trouble than they're worth,' growled one. 'I'd give them a good spanking if they were mine.'

Seven boys from rival gangs pelted each other with straw

and then fought with sticks until an old man hit at them with a flail. Tob and two little boys sneaked off to the end of the field where they took turns making long jumps into the wheat. An angry labourer chased them with a pitchfork. Tob, yelling as he ran, tripped and sprawled in the stubble. Lucy May rescued him and dragged him back to the thrashing area. 'You're a disgrace. I don't know what Mama would say.'

'My hands are all sore,' whimpered Tob.

'So are mine,' confessed Lucy May. 'And they're tired.'

'Let's hide behind those stooks. No! Look! Here comes Mr Princeton.'

'Afternoon children,' he called. 'I hope you're working hard. This is one of *my* fields you know.'

'Oh! Good afternoon sir. We were working hard.'

'Is your mother here?'

'No sir.'

'What about your father?'

'He's splitting stringy bark at the Tiers, sir. He said he couldn't work at Glen Osmond, because of what happened to Adam.'

'Yes, of course. But working in the Tiers. That's a shocking waste of his farming skills. I wish I'd known before. I'll find your father and arrange something better for him.' Mr Princeton put a hand on each of their shoulders and looked at them intently. 'Has your father told you about Mount Barker?'

'Yes sir.'

'And are you sure you still want to live on a farm?' He smiled kindly.

'Oh yes sir.'

'Good. I'm on my way to the Tiers now. I think I could do something for you all sooner than we'd planned. So keep on believing in that farm. Good day children.'

'Good day, sir.'

Lucy May clapped her hands and Tob danced about.

'What does he really mean?'

'I think it's a surprise—a good surprise. Let's find Kate and go home to tell Mama.'

Chapter 28

GOODBYE ADELAIDE

'I knew it would be a good surprise,' said Lucy May happily at tea-time two days later.

'If you'd all calm down,' said her father, 'I might be able to explain properly. It's like this: I haven't enough money left to buy a farm outright, but Mr Princeton has offered me some of his land and a house. I shall work partly for him, and partly for ourselves. In a few years, if we have good seasons, we shall own our own farm.'

'I don't understand . . .' began Lucy May.

'Oh never mind now.' Kate rushed in. 'Tell us what the house is like Papa. Have we got a nice bedroom? Will we have a horse and . . .'

'There's no need to forget your manners Kate,' Mr Popple reproved her. 'I'll explain another time, Lucy May. Yes, the house is bigger than this one, with fair-sized rooms, but there's not much garden yet.'

'Will there be a kitchen range, Arthur?' Annie Popple looked hopeful.

'Yes, my dear. You will have a proper stove at last. That's certain. And (this will please the children) the green and yellow cart and the horse now belong to us.'

The children could hardly speak for excitement, and Tob

jumped up and down.

'Wait! You haven't heard all yet. John and I will go to Mount Barker in two or three day's time. John will repair a wooden cottage close by, because he and Clara will be married as soon as we are settled, and live there.' They all gasped with pleasure and Arthur Popple beamed at them all. 'You'll all be delighted with Mount Barker,' he assured them. 'There is undulating country with creeks and gullies, sheep, wheat—the lot.'

A farm! And a wedding!

'A double surprise,' said Kate.

She and her sister upset a mug of tea while Tob nearly choked and had to be dragged outside and dealt with sternly.

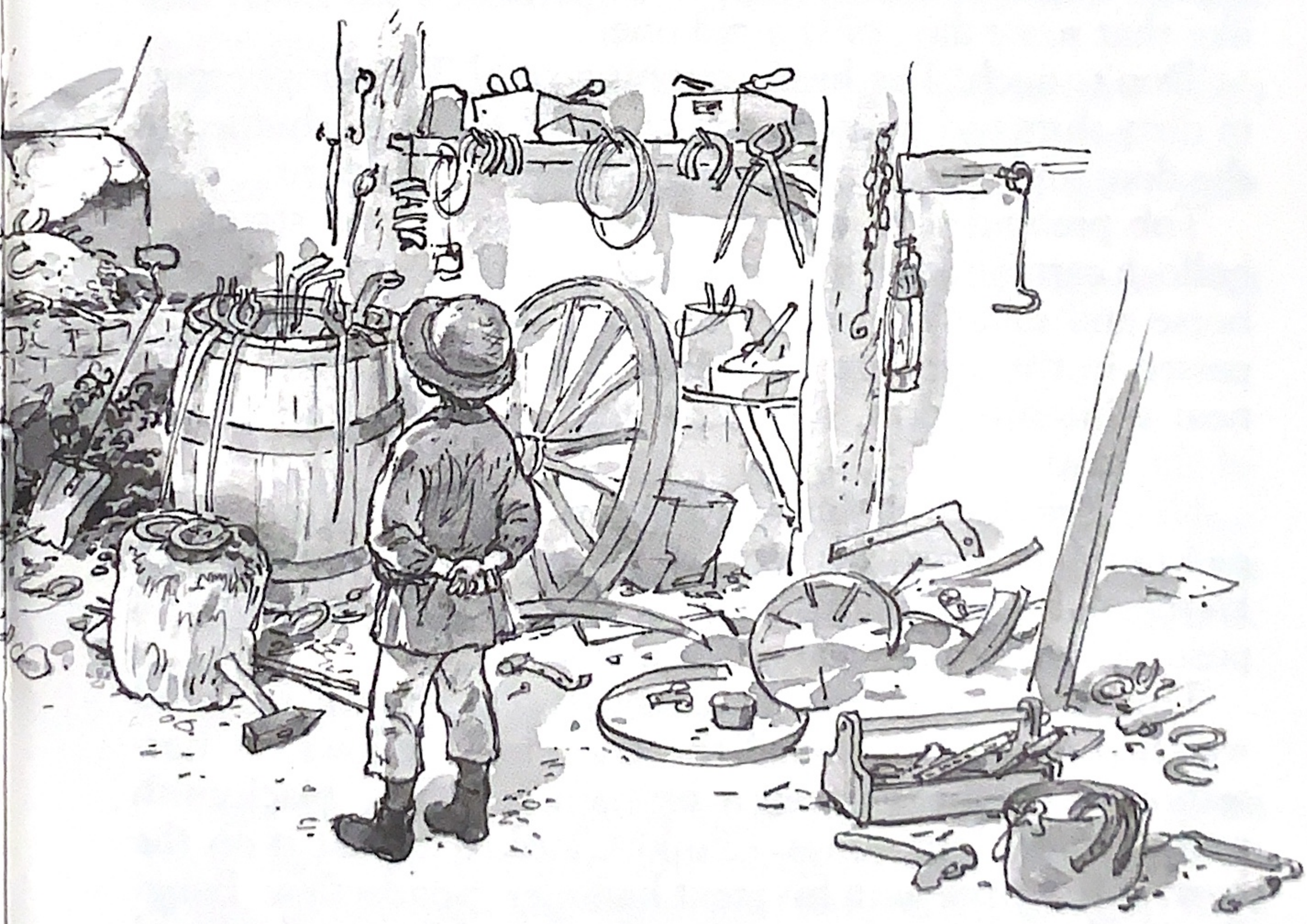
'It's almost too much, Arthur,' sighed Annie Popple. After all this long time, everything's going to happen at once.'

'Well my dear, we must all give thanks in our prayers tonight. The Good Lord has led us through many difficulties and privations to good pastures across the hills.'

There was silence for a while. Then Clara asked quietly, 'Please Papa, when do we move? I have a wedding dress to make.'

'We have two or three weeks to get ready. That should be long enough for you all to celebrate Christmas with our friends here, then move one or two days later.'

'I'm going to watch the blacksmith *every day*,' said Tob.



His mother and sisters looked at him severely.

'I'm going to make quite sure the animals are all right,' said Lucy May.

'I have sent for Ben,' Arthur Popple continued. 'He should be here in a day or two, and will look after you while I'm away.'

'Oh Arthur! We don't need looking after.'

'I dare say, my dear.' But there are more of those ruffians from New South Wales coming over, and I'd feel easier in my mind if I knew Ben was here.'

Tob stared at the saddlers shop. Saddles and collars on pegs framed the doorway. Reins and winkers dropped from a nail on one side of it, and traces and chains hung from the other. More saddles and pack-saddles with coils of rope and cord were stacked beneath a long narrow window. Tob sniffed the good strong smell of leather, sidled closer, and timidly stroked a small saddle. He thought: 'I'll have a saddle like that some day, only a red one.'

'Don't touch! I've been watching you.' The shopkeeper, in dirty shirt and trousers, and chewing tobacco, shuffled to the door and spat on his broken island of pavement.

Tob pretended to whistle as he turned to the street. A bullock cart followed by yapping dogs lumbered past. A sleek horse and smart buggy trotted along, while a four-in-hand passed in the opposite direction. Two Aborigines squatted near a hitching post, and three men argued in the middle of the road.

Near the door of the dim forge a harrow, plough-share, picks and crowbars lay in a heap, waiting for sharpening. Harness, traces, chains and swingle-bars dangled from a post. A brown mare waited patiently.

Tob stood near the blacksmith's gleaming fire and watched as a boy pumped the enormous bellows. A horseshoe in the fire glowed a brilliant red. The blacksmith took it in his long tongs. Clink! Clonk! He beat it on the horn of the anvil with his great hammer. Sparks flew. Bang! Bang! The hammer bounced on the flat of the anvil. Clink! Clonk! Bang! Bang! Sparks flew again. The blacksmith shaped it several times. The bright shoe faded to dull red and then to black again. The smith put it back into the fire

and raked the coals over it. 'Speed up the bellows,' he said to the boy.

As he wiped the sweat from his forehead he saw Tob's intent face. 'Hullo young fellow. Leaving us, I hear.'

'Yes,' said Tob. 'We've got a farm now. But I don't want to go.'

'A farm, eh? That's just the ticket. Lots of animals. Not just horses.'

'Yes. But I'll miss things.'

'You like Adelaide then?'

'I like your forge. I could watch all day.'

'You'll be all right.' Clink! Clonk! The sparks flew. Bang! Bang! The hammer bounced. 'Where you're going, the boss 'll have his own smithy, I reckon.' Down came the hammer again.

'It won't be as good as yours.'

Lucy May and Kate stood in the middle of their favourite store that sold anything from birch brooms, guns and iron hoops, to oils, pills and nightcaps. Behind the counter, rows of small square drawers with torn and dusty labels concealed intriguing things. Jars and bottles, some coloured some plain, were arranged on the shelf above the drawers. Jugs

and basins, quart pots, hinges, nails and tools littered a shelf on one side of the shop, while bolts of cloth, flannel and serge, slippers and stockings, had been arranged a little more neatly on the opposite side. Bins, barrels and sacks standing on the floor held flour, oatmeal, sugar and tea.

The girls sniffed the good, mixed smells—spices and onions, beeswax and cheese. Six customers made the shop unusually crowded. 'It's our last visit,' said Lucy May mournfully, 'and Mr Gumtum doesn't even notice us.'

'No good hanging round,' advised Kate. 'Let's find Tob.'

At the corner of Franklin Street she exclaimed, 'We forgot to buy Mama's things.'

'And we've got thre'pence to spend,' said Lucy May sadly.

John saw Ben outside the *Drovers Arms*.

'Good heavens, Ben! What have you done to your face?'

'I had a fight with a workman.'

'Gee! That's bad! I can understand a fight with Big Bill, but why a workman?'

'Well. I want to do something for Reverend Stone. So when I noticed a rough corner on his new stone chapel, I began to face it—I was a mason's boy once, you know. But a workman got angry and said I was finding fault with his work.

'It could look like that to him. And you could be getting grand ideas like Reverend Stow, with his large chapel and elaborate pulpit and all.'

'And why not? He's planning for the future, isn't he? And he's a great preacher and a great scholar.' Ben spoke enthusiastically, although his face hurt when he talked. 'He's been my tutor for a long time now, and he's hard up too.'

'All right, Ben. I'm glad you wanted to help, but you can't blame the workman, can you?'

'I suppose not. Anyway, we had a good fight—I'm better at it now. Does my face look much of a mess?'

'It's not too bad. But what you need is a pint. Come on.'

'Thanks John, but I don't go into public houses.'

'I know your father doesn't approve—that's one of the things on which we differ. But a pint of ale's all right. I'm not asking you to drink spirits.'

Ben still felt uncertain.

'You've got to grow up sometime Ben. You're far too sensible to drink too much. Try half a pint.'

They sat on a wooden form at a rough bench and listened to the loud talk and smelt the stale smells. John watched as Ben sipped warily. 'Looking forward to Mount Barker?'

'Not really. As you know, I don't want to be a farmer, and Papa doesn't approve of me studying, even in my own free time—such as it is.'

'Farming's not my line either. But there won't be enough carpentry round the Popple-Princeton households to keep me going all the time, so I'll lend your father a hand. He may see things differently when he sees he has an extra man round the place. Farmers tend to take it for granted that their sons will work for them and go on working for them.'

'Yes I know. But I'd work willingly if I thought I could be free in a few years time.'

'Your father's not an easy person to get on with is he?' John gave Ben an understanding simle. 'But between us, we should be able to work him round. It will be a big strain on me, because I always want to argue with him. You could help there. How do you like the ale by the way? I'm afraid it gets warmer and muddier every time I come in. But it's encouraging stuff. How are your studies going?'

'Quite well really—if I had more time.'

John drained his tankard. 'I think I need another. As a matter of fact, Ben, your tutor told me yesterday that he thinks a lot of you, and is certain you should return to England and study for a profession.'

'Thanks for telling me John. That bucks me up. I'll go and see him now and borrow some more books.'

Clara ran up to the counter in the drapers shop. 'Oh Miss Simpring, I've come for it at last.'

'I *am* glad Miss Popple, I was beginning to think you would never get . . . that you'd never be able to take it away.' Miss Simpring blushed.

She disappeared into her little dark back-room and returned with a carefully wrapped parcel. Her fingers trembled as she untied the tape round it. She smoothed the brown paper and coyly peeped inside the tissue paper as if afraid that the contents might have escaped.

'There you are,' she said. 'It is beautiful, isn't it? I shall be quite sorry to see it go.'

Clara slid her hand lovingly over the blue watered silk. 'Yes.' She smiled at Miss Simpring. 'You have looked after it splendidly. This dress will have to last me for a long time.'

'I shall miss you, Miss Popple.' The shy assistant became talkative. 'You've been paying off a little bit now and then for so long, that I've come to look forward to your visits. I've kept your account carefully.'

'I do hope Papa doesn't find out.' Clara glanced round the shop nervously. 'He thinks it's really wicked to buy anything unless it can be paid for outright!'

'I'm sure all will be well, Miss Popple.' Miss Simpring found a small cardboard box and opened it carefully. 'Here are the buttons. Fifty of them. And not much bigger than grains of rice. I've counted them five times, but you may count them if you like.'

'No,' said Clara, 'I'm sure I can rely on you.'

Miss Simpring made out the final bill. She smiled sadly. 'I'm sure you will make a lovely bride, Miss Popple.'

Clara blushed.

Chapter 29

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Long shadows lay across the track on the second afternoon of their journey, a little procession wound its way through the tiny township of Mount Barker.

'Nearly there,' said Arthur Popple cheerfully. 'The great moment will soon be here.' He looked round at his family and was surprised to see weary and dispirited faces. 'You were all chatting away a while ago, what on earth's the matter?'

'I think . . .' Kate began.

'Think what, my girl?'

'It's wonderful to be almost at the gate of our own farm. At last. But it's kind of lonely, too. We don't know anyone—except Mr Princeton, and we don't know *him* properly.'

Lucy May agreed. 'If only a few of our old friends could come to the wedding.'

'People can't afford five or six days, even for a wedding,' her father explained. 'It's a long way to travel. You'll soon make new friends. Open the gate please, Ben. The next one will be our own. Come on all of you. Cheer up. I'm sure you'll like the place.'

Interest revived, and they looked about eagerly, hoping that each twist and turn of the road would reveal their farm

house. Then at last, there it was! A square stone cottage, behind a small yard with outbuildings on one side.

'Look! There's even smoke coming out of the chimney.' said Annie Popple with a catch in her voice.

There was a moment's silence, then the door of the house flew open, and out rushed Billie Jamling. Kate leapt down from the cart and ran towards him. They hugged each other.

'Kate!'

'Oh Billie!'

The others clambered down and greeted Billie and then hugged and kissed each other. They laughed—some with tears.

'I've been looking for you all day,' said Billie. 'I'm working for Mr Princeton now. I'm an extra surprise.'

They all talked at once. Tob and Lucy May ran off to explore.

'Come on. I want to be the first to see the inside.' Kate, pulling Billie along ran forward. The others followed close behind.

A neat maid smiled at the door. 'Welcome, Mam, Sir,

and everybody,' she said. 'Mrs Princeton sent me over to help. She'll be here later. The tea's nearly ready.'

They murmured their thanks. Kate scarcely glanced at the kitchen, but ran down the passage looking in the rooms. 'Three bedrooms. *Three*, mind you.' And look! A parlour with a fire-place. Fancy a house with *two* chimneys. It's as good as Yorkshire.'

She dashed to the door at the end of the passage and collided with Tob and Lucy May who were pushing their way in.

'Look out, can't you.'

'You nearly jammed my finger.'

'In the shed—harness and saddles and tools and . . .'

'There's a parlour with a fire-place.'

'And there's a big work horse.'

'There's a big tree outside one bedroom. I hope it's mine.'

'And there's meadows and trees and a creek and . . .'

'Tell them what's in the shed, Lucy May.'

'No. You do.'

'Oh go on.'

'You tell them.'

'Well, it's her *plough*. All mended and shining.'

'That's wonderful! Let's look round outside.'

'I'll show you,' Billie said. 'Come on. Let's all go.'

The older members of the family lingered in the kitchen. Annie Popple looked eagerly at the stove. 'A *proper* kitchen range, all polished and tidy, and a fire glowing.'

'Even the hearth's been swept and scrubbed,' added Clara.

'There's food ready on the table,' said Ben hopefully.

'Gee! That's good!' John also approved. 'Bread and butter and even cake. But we'd better look round with the children, I suppose.' He put his arms round Clara. 'Come on love. You're the luckiest of all, you know—you've got *two* houses now.'

Clara rested her head against John's shoulder and smiled up at him. 'I'm so glad for Papa and Mama,' she said softly. 'It's a big moment for them.' She smiled at Ben who followed her down the passage.

Alone in the kitchen for a few moments, Arthur Popple held Annie close. 'Oh Arthur. It's home at last.'

'Yes, my dear, and you have been wonderful. You have

helped us all through good times and bad. We couldn't have managed without you. May God be praised for this day.'

Kate rushed in followed by Lucy May and the maid. 'Come and look at all the rooms and . . .' She looked round the kitchen. 'Jinkers! It's almost square, and it's got a ceiling. Just imagine! A kitchen with a ceiling!' She looked round warily in case Billie could hear. 'Remember Mrs Jamling saying all kitchens in South Australia were "lorfty long-ways"?' They all laughed. 'Well, this kitchen's lorfty every-way. Come on, May.' She darted off. The maid looked surprised.

In the passage, a hubub of questions, comments and explanations continued. Mr Popple watched for a while, and then began to feel worried. He opened his mouth to say, 'That's enough of that,' when Kate brushed Clara, Ben and Tob aside and flung her arms round him. Much to everybody's surprise, and her own astonishment, she kissed him soundly, and almost shouted, 'So you thought we'd like the place, did you? Like the place! It's glor . . . underful.' She kissed him again.

They all laughed and almost cried again.

Lucy May decided to hug her father too. 'Oh Papa. Are the meadows and the brook on *our* land?'

Arthur Popple looked pleased and surprised. 'Yes. I'm so glad you like it all. And yes, the slopes across the creek are ours too, and there's pasture beyond with a bigger creek, and the wooded hill is ours as well. I'll show you after tea.'

'It's a fine property,' said Ben earnestly. 'I'm really impressed. I think it was worth waiting for.'

There was a lull, then Annie Popple called, 'Tea's ready.'

'That's just what we need,' said her husband. We can all sit round the table in our own farmhouse, and eat the good things our friends have provided. May God bless us all."

They ate ravenously, absorbed in memories and happy plans for the future.

During the next four days there was constant bustle and commotion, unpacking and unwrapping, cooking and cleaning, planning and re-planning. The animals had to be settled in too. Sticky, Pansy and Soppy had to be tethered to special stakes or trees—especially Sticky, who still jerked

herself free occasionally. The hens and ducks had to be housed safely each night after roaming about in the day time, and of course Lucy May took special care of her rabbit and the cat.

Mrs Princeton offered her house and garden for the wedding and wedding breakfast. Clara, Annie Popple, Mrs Princeton and her servant girls produced mountains of cakes, pies and buns, and Lucy May and Tob made a rather muddy fruit cup.

Early on the wedding morning, Mr Popple took his family in the green and yellow cart on a mysterious excursion. He led them to a stream in a secluded gully on the edge of their land, where white tea-tree tinged with pink grew profusely. He cut some long branches which Ben and the children dragged back to the cart. Then they all looked for wildflowers.

The girls returned to the cart with their hands full, but Tob would not come when called. Lucy May scolded him and tried to hurry him, but Kate saw he was upset and went to help. 'It's a secret,' he said. 'I'm old enough to have secrets now.'

He was happy again when Kate freed several strands of clematis from a thorny bush. The twining stems were starred with long pointed flowers, and white plumed seeds made fluffy balls between the flowers.

Clara stood and watched as the flowery cart drew up at the door. Tob ran to her, trailing the clematis. 'It's from Adam,' he said, 'He would have wanted to share with us.'

Clara kissed him. 'It will look lovely with the rosebuds in my bouquet,' she said.

At the entrance to the veranda, Mr Princeton had made a wire archway for climbing roses, but these were still small. Ben and Kate tied branches of tea-tree over it and so made a green and white frame where bride and groom stood to welcome the guests. The girls arranged sprays of wildflowers on the tables and placed tubs of bottle-brush and heath by the veranda steps.

And so the double surprise had a double celebration. The family attended the ceremony in the drawing room, and people came from the surrounding farms and the township for the wedding feast in the garden. They all declared it a

wonderful New Year wedding, and they danced and talked all through the hot, summer night.

'It's a party for all of us,' said Kate. 'I think we deserve it.' She wore a pretty new frock and had made several new friends. Lucy May and Tob ate and drank almost constantly, and had a short nap on the sitting-room floor.

With sounds of 'Happy New Year' all round them, the family watched as Clara and John walked through the moonlight to their new home.

Suddenly, Kate felt exhausted. 'Get off the flower garden you two,' she scolded, 'You just stood on one of Mrs Princeton's good plants.'

'Sorry. No need to be so snappy.' Lucy May was half asleep.

'And,' continued Kate, 'please get into the cart and stay there till we've said our 'thank yous' and 'good byes'. Ben has harnessed the horse.'

'I 'spose she'll order us about more than ever, now,' grumbled Tob, as he and his sister sidled away. The parents soon joined the children.

Kate yawned. 'It was a lovely day, wasn't it?'

Annie Popple smiled and dabbed her eyes.

'It's a new life for all of us,' Arthur Popple said. 'May God be thanked and bless us all.'

SWAMPY GROUND

PORT ADELAIDE

ROAD TO PORT ADELAIDE

RIVER PORT

REED BEDS

TORRENS RIVER

GULF OF ST. VINCENT

REED BEDS

LOW GROUNDS

FRESH WATER LAGOONS

STURT CREEK

ROAD TO ADELAIDE

HOLDFAST BAY SETTLEMENT

FINE PLAINS

NORTH ADELAIDE

WOODED COUNTRY

THE TOWN
ADELAIDE

GOVERNMENT HUT

THE TIERS
TO MOUNT BARKER

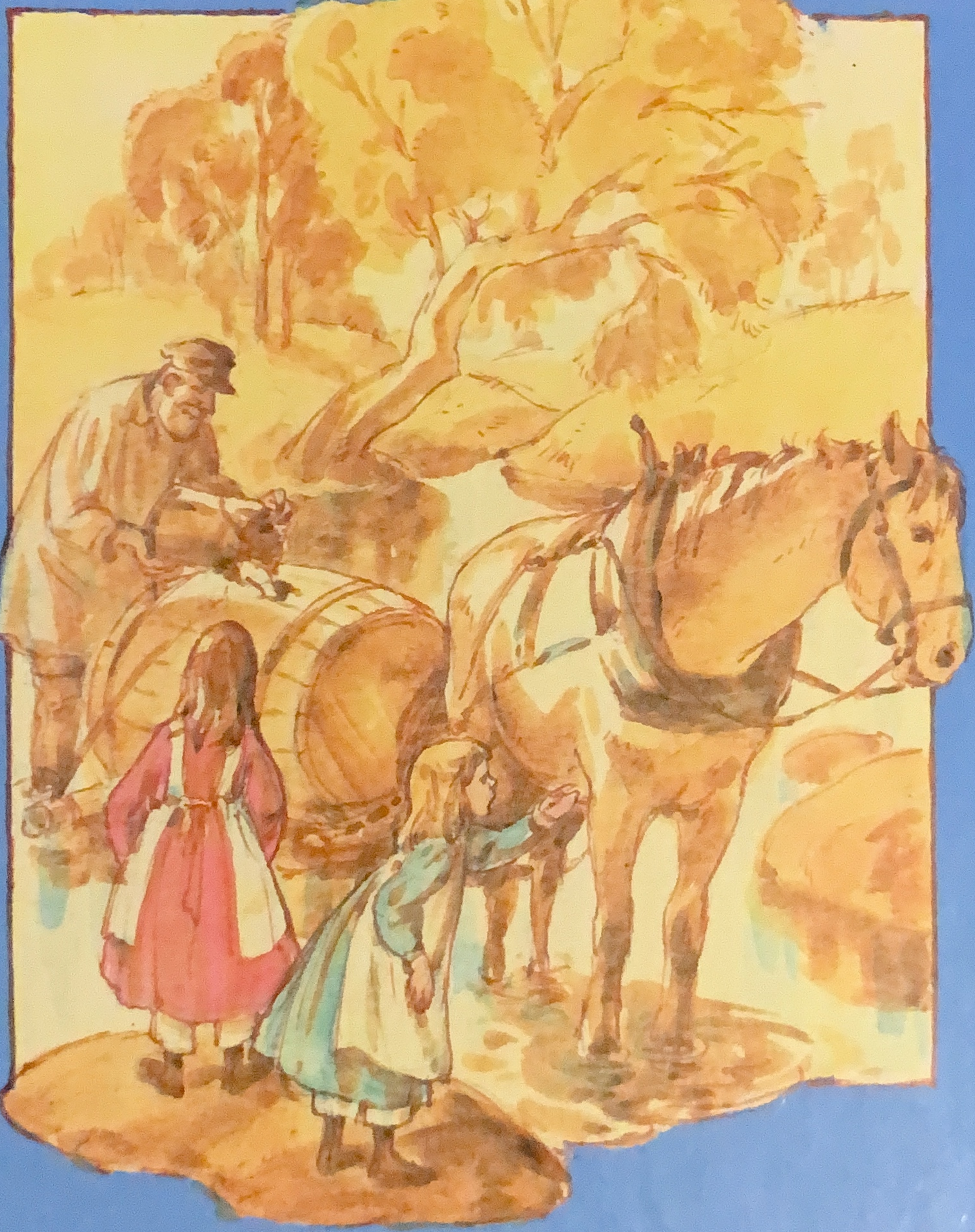
WOODED COUNTRY

PLAINS

BROWN HILL

The Early Settlement of ADELAIDE

From the moment the Popples land on the hot beach in South Australia, with their unsuitable clothes and piles of baggage, they find that settlers' life is full of problems, surprises and adventures. It's hard work, but never dull — especially for the the children.



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